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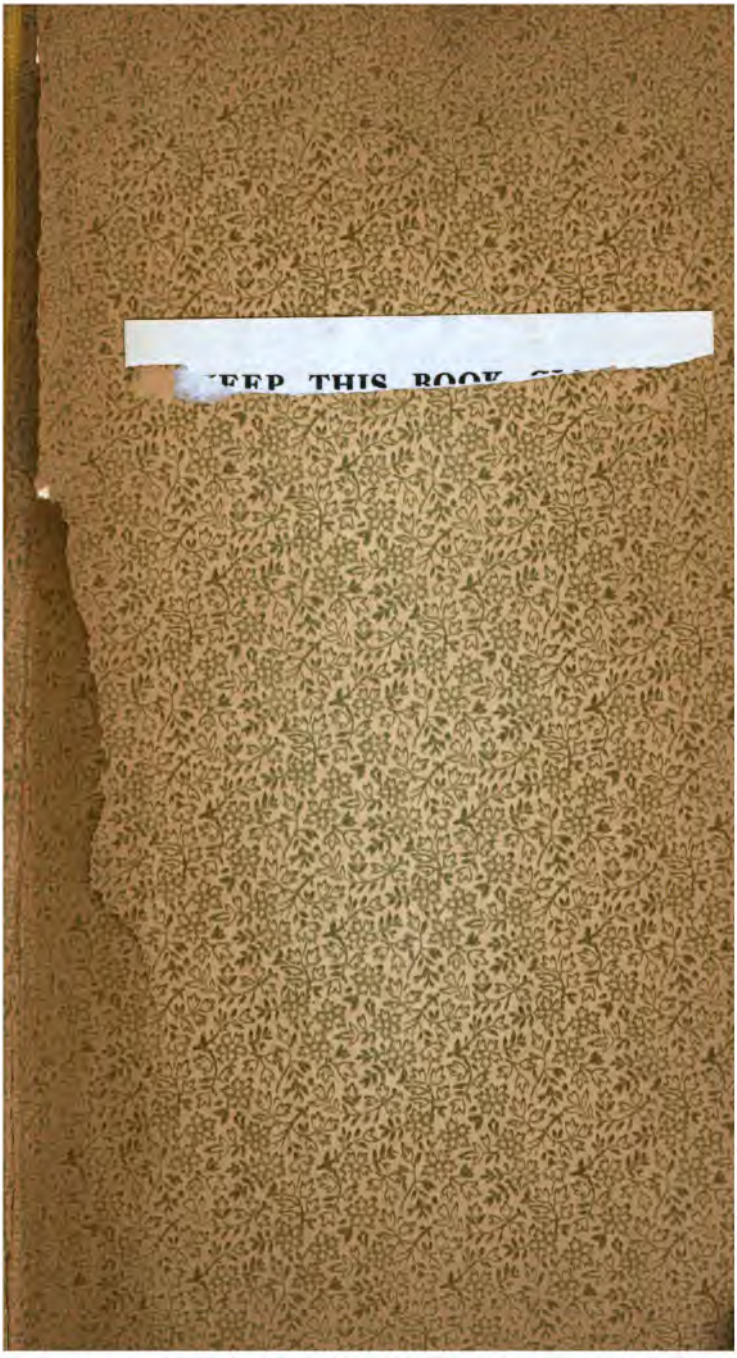

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Rod

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A Novel

Translated from the French of

ÉDOUARD ROD

With Illustrations by

E. BOYD SMITH

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CHAPTER I

The Cattle Fair

It was the morning of the cattle fair, a holiday in Bielle, the pretty Vaudois town whose old houses rise in tiers above one another on the shores of Lake Leman, a day long spoken of before its coming, looked forward to as much as Easter or Christmas, but generally spoiled by the rain, so much so that there is a local proverb on the subject. Now this year, the weather promised finely for the cattle fair. Peasants from all the neighboring villages had arrived early in their blue blouses and soft hats, and were tethering their oxen, cows and sheep to the iron rings on the outside wall of the Place d'Armes. The lowing, bleating and bellowing of the animals, blended with the animated chaffering of buyer and seller, made a terrible uproar under the plane-trees that border each side of the highway leading to Lausanne, while in the neighboring taverns warm discussions went on, punctuated by the quaffing of many a bumper of the thin white wine of the Canton. It might be about nine. Springtime mists were still wandering about in the atmosphere, muffling the monotonous summits of the Jura in the distance, whose rounded

and regular outline could barely be guessed at beyond the tops of the plane-trees. But the sun was already dispersing them, and it was easy to foresee that the landscape would soon be relieved of their presence.

Undoubtedly, the rarity of this bright sun had something to do with the visit which certain of the notables of Bielle were paying to the cattle. These were approaching with mincing little steps, lounging along, one after the other, with cigar in mouth or hands in pockets; neighbor advancing toward neighbor in leisurely fashion and talking composedly, like persons who have nothing important to say, while bands of saucy young urchins were running between the legs of the cows at the risk of meeting some unpleasant consequences. It was somewhat in this way that M. Rabourin, the hatter, a stout, short, apoplectic personage, with a little pepper and salt moustache, which contrasted with the almost violet tone of his fat face, accosted his neighbor Mauseberg, a Bâlois of heavy appearance, with enormous, encroaching feet that seemed to take possession of the soil on which they were planted. A sly fellow he, if ever there was one. Although scarcely more than five or six years established in Bielle, he was growing rich as a Jew banker with his Bazar Universel, a sort of omnium-gatherum, where everything is to be found, especially affected by the peasants; while Rabourin, a prey to other ambitions, neglected his business for politics, was greedy after every office, and beaten at every election.

"The proverb has lied this year," said M. Rabourin.

"What proverb?" asked Mauseberg.

"What, don't you know it? —

'The day the cattle fair takes place,
No one needs to wash his face.'"

The Bâlois did not understand at once, being of a slow mind. While his companion was explaining the meaning of the saying, came the notary Tiercet, long, lean and bony, with his impassive face and bleary eyes and little thin nose abruptly tilted. He had the gait of a wading bird furnished with the beak of a bird of prey. He joined the pair without interrupting the conversation, being one of those who speak little, hear much and always have the air of ruminating something. A moment after, this conversation, which still turned on the kind of weather they were accustomed to at cattle fairs, was broken into by the syndic, Charles Quartier, a man of portentous dimensions, his red countenance bristling with yellow hair, blowing like a porpoise, jovial, as he was always, with a joviality, however, that was rather calculated and employed at opportune moments to hide deep designs. He was perspiring all over. While shaking the hands that were tendered to him, he took off his vast straw hat — the first straw hat of the season — disclosing a thick fleece of tangled hair, yellow as his beard, although a little grizzled, and steeped in sweat. He shouted at them, rolling forth his familiar oath in thunderous tones: "Nom de nom!

Nom de nom! What infernal weather for the month of April!"

"The weather is good," said Mauseberg, with his Bâlois accent, at once shrill and thick. "It's good for the vines."

M. Tiercet, who was of an anxious temper, murmured in his thin, flutelike voice:

"But let the least frost come, and then—"

The syndic prevented him from continuing.

"Shut your mouth, you bird of ill-omen! If only a quarter of the misfortunes happened that you predict, we might bundle out of this world and go live, God knows where—in the moon!"

Upon which he gave him a friendly tap on the shoulder, accompanied by a burst of laughter.

"Oh! I make no predictions!" explained M. Tiercet. "I only say that with those abominable frosts one never knows what to expect in autumn."

"You are in too great a hurry to find out, my friend—too great a hurry—Deuce take it, man!—Everything turns out all right for a fellow who knows how to wait; now doesn't it?"

At this moment the four men had to draw aside to let pass a singular-looking turnout that was holding possession of the middle of the encumbered street.

There was nothing very formidable, for that matter, about the equipage. It consisted of a hay-cart, loaded with furniture, and painfully drawn by an old horse, so raw-boned and wretched that one might expect him to

drop down at every step. In front, on a plank placed crosswise, and serving for a seat, was perched an old woman in a black gown and broad-brimmed straw hat, black also. She looked the peasant all over, although there was something about her that did not smack of the villages near by. She was holding the reins and whip, and by the cart stalked along a tall, angular youth, with stooping shoulders. He was dressed in a long overcoat, high hat and hobnailed shoes, white with dust, and walked with eyes bent on the ground.

A pair of young scamps tried to hook on to the cart behind. The old woman perceived it, turned round with a furious air and dealt them a cut with her whip, which did not reach them. They fell back, laughing and hurling their slangy gibes after her; she replied with two or three threatening gestures, while her companion, raising his head, as if awaking out of a long reverie, followed them with a look at once astonished and ingenuous, gentle and sad.

The four Biellians were still observing the strangers.

"They don't come here to sell their old screw, that's sure!" said M. Rabourin. Mauseberg shook his head.

"They would not make much by it," he added. "And, nevertheless, who knows! There is no kind of goods that you won't find some one running after —"

"Oh! as far as you are concerned," retorted Rabourin, "is there anything you wouldn't sell? You would find a way of passing off on some unhappy purchaser that spavined jade as a thoroughbred!"

The syndic was still observing the man in the long overcoat. As the cart was on the point of disappearing at a bend of the road and entering the town, he turned to his companion and cried, with a gesture of stupefaction:

"Nom de nom! I believe it is our new pastor, M. Trembloz!"

His hearers held their breath for a few moments, utterly bewildered.

"That a pastor!" exclaimed M. Rabourin. Mauseberg rolled his eyes, as if scared out of his senses.

"Impossible! Impossible!" he repeated, while M. Tiercet prudently waited.

"No, no; I am not mistaken," said the syndic. "I knew him immediately, although I have seen him only once before — when I went with the members of the parish council to hear him preach —" And with an expression of great annoyance, he continued:

"But he did not make such a bad appearance in his pulpit."

"A nice nomination you have made of it!" grumbled Rabourin, enchanted at catching the syndic in a blunder.

Thereupon, M. Quartier raised his arms in appeal to heaven and cried that he would have liked to see them in his place.

"We are sent into a mountain parish in winter, and during such infernal weather that you would not turn a dog into the street. The sermon wasn't so bad, at all.

As to the pastor, we hardly saw him for five minutes. He had just lost his father, and was not able to be present at the banquet to which we were invited. Besides, there was no other possible candidate."

"Hem! hem!" said M. Rabourin.

"Are you quite sure it is he?" asked M. Tiercet.

"Well — I think so. For that matter, it is not so difficult to find out. Come along and let us have the matter settled!" The four companions started on the march as fast as the obesity of M. Quartier permitted. But, indeed, they had no occasion to exert themselves in order to reach the hay-cart, the joltings of which on the uneven pavement of the main street were becoming terrible. They saw it advance slowly up to the old square tower of the Horloge, which shuts in the principal artery of Bielle. People were leaving their shops to look at it passing, cracking jokes on the horse, or oftener, with a disdainful glance, pricing the value of the scanty furniture. However M. Pidoux, the apothecary, newly shaved, with his hair frizzed up in a tuff and his gold spectacles bestriding a nose that was somewhat red, having just got rid of a customer, stopped M. Rabourin as he was passing.

"What's that?" he asked, pointing to the cart.

"That," replied the latter, "is —"

He stopped, choking with laughter.

"No, I won't tell you what it is — Guess!" And he continued his course, letting M. Pidoux, very curious and a little vexed, return behind his red bottles unsatisfied.

However, a new incident retarded the progress of the hay-cart. Three riders, one of them a very young Amazon, were advancing from the opposite direction. One of their horses, seized with fear, began to rear. It took some minutes to master him, during which the equipage had to stand still. A quiver of excitement passed from one end to the other of the peaceful street, where, all of a sudden, faces inflamed with curiosity were seen in increasing numbers in front of the shops. Then things returned to their usual state, and, as the cart began to jerk backward and forward anew, the syndic cried with a gesture of despair: "You see now that they are taking the road to the parsonage!"

And, indeed, the cart had advanced to the right of the Horloge and was turning into a narrow lane which it almost blocked up. It came to a stop at last in front of a gateway painted in green and white chevrons, the Cantonal colors. The four Biellians stopped also at some distance.

"The thing is past doubt now!" exclaimed Rabourin, with a sneering laugh.

M. Quartier, puffing, sweating, rolling his big hat in one hand and scratching his head with the other, could only repeat: "Ah! nom de nom!—Nom de nom!" There was something so comical in the embarrassment of a man ordinarily so well satisfied with himself, that a vague ironical smile flickered on the impassive countenance of M. Tiercet.

"Oh! any one may make a mistake," declared Mauseberg, "but he's a droll pastor, all the same!"

M. Tiercet, who had as yet said nothing, plucked up courage to murmur:

"It is true his appearance is hardly a recommendation. But who can tell! We had better wait awhile and—"

"How is he going to get along with his colleague, who likes his clerical associates to be gentlemen?" asked M. Rabourin.

M. Quartier shrugged his shoulders.

"That," he said, "is the least important side of the question. They will not get along, you may rely on it! Did you ever know a pastor who kept on good terms with M. Sordes? That's not what I'm afraid of; if only the parishioners don't find too much fault with him!"

He gazed anxiously at his three companions, who were, each in his own way, enjoying the embarrassment of their chief magistrate.

"Oh," said M. Rabourin in a facetious tone, "he will have your support and that's the main thing. For you had him nominated, M. le Syndic, you, and nobody else."

M. Quartier raised his hands to heaven: "I beg your pardon! excuse me!" he cried, "it was the delegates of the parish. We were four—I counted merely one. And we all had the same favorable impression—all—"

"Oh!" interrupted the hatter, "a fine story you are telling us! When every one is aware you lead us by the nose wherever you like!"

This two-edged compliment, at which a smile broke over the countenance of M. Tiercet, ended the conversation. The four Biellians cast a last look on the hay-cart which was waiting to be unloaded, and went back to tell in the town how the new pastor had arrived without drums beating or colors flying, and was preparing to set up housekeeping. So that all the morning there was a continuous coming and going of inquisitive folk, sauntering lazily by the parsonage, observing what they could and returning to their business after commenting on the event of the day. In the meanwhile the cart did not take long to unload.

CHAPTER II

At the Parsonage

HENRI, the Fool — a poor, gray-bearded wretch, still in his childhood — his muscles alone having developed, — on getting a glimpse of the equipage, had followed it, scenting a possible job. At a sign from the old woman he set to work. The pastor, too, laid aside his overcoat and tall hat, and between the three of them the shabby furniture was soon in the house and arranged to their satisfaction. It was almost entirely of deal, and so was not very heavy. The ardor with which they labored hindered them from noticing that the shutters of a window in the adjoining house — the second parsonage — were partially opened a couple of times, just sufficiently to allow a succession of heads to peep out; namely, the head of Pastor Sordes, framed in a thick, bristling beard that was almost white, and hair that was almost black, lying flat on the temples, with a long, aggressive nose, daubed with snuff as usual; the head of Mme. Sordes, with little, crafty, pinched features, thin lips always ready for devout sighs, and resigned eyes of bluish gray instinctively raised towards heaven; the head of their daughter, Jeanne, plain, insipid, colorless, with heavy

eyelids and an air of being half asleep, as if she was customarily indifferent to all the incidents of daily life, being simple of spirit; finally, the heads of the two servants.

M. Sordes only looked once — it was enough for him — and then took a pinch of snuff to console himself in advance, exclaiming: "God only knows what kind of a colleague they have given me again!"

Mme. Sordes was a better observer: before the morning was past she could have given a detailed inventory of every piece of furniture belonging to her new neighbors.

"They are very poor people," she said to her husband. "Would you believe, they have neither bureau nor secretary? — a single sofa; for the parlor, I think — and such a sofa!"

Clearly, the poverty of the new colleague jarred on the tastes of this woman, accustomed to comfort and to the society of well-to-do people from childhood, and proud of the position of her husband. But she spoke without ill feeling, while M. Sordes availed himself of the opportunity to return to one of his favorite grievances.

"Why does not the state lodge us differently? If the two parsonages were separated, instead of being contiguous, they might send all the ragamuffins of theology in the world here, for all I cared!"

"If the Trembloz people make themselves unpleasant, we need not see them," she replied in a tone of conciliation.

"We need not see them, need not see them!" grumbled the pastor. "As if we could help seeing them! They will be there under our eyes every day. We cannot go out and cross the yard without passing before the door. I have decided to ask for a private passageway. Yes, after twenty-five years' service I may well obtain that from them!"

However, when everything was out of the cart, Mme. Trembloz gave a ten sous piece to Henri, the Fool, who, not at all pleased, complained and gesticulated without getting more, and then went away muttering discontentedly.

"I am going to see if there is a baker," she said then to her son. "We have cheese and sausage, we must make the best of them for this day."

And she started toward the town.

The young pastor, when he found himself alone, thought he would look about him. The yard was rather pretty; it had no flowers, but, instead, little clumps of trees and an old cedar surrounded by a circular bench, more favorable to meditation than to conversation. The two families that shared it between them could have the enjoyment of it by turning their backs on each other, an arrangement in harmony with the ordinary state of their relations. A large gate, painted like the shutters of the house, in the Cantonal colors, separated the yard from a little square shaded by plane-trees. Trembloz opened it; behind the trees he saw the church; his church, that church in which he

would preach every Sunday, baptize infants, confirm the young and give the nuptial benediction to the bride and bridegroom. It was a very old church, thick, massive, too broad for its height, of no known order of architecture and without beauty. It had been newly plastered, and the clear tone of its walls contrasted with its air of antiquity. Against the base of one of its buttresses lay a stone statue, without nose or ears, worn away by the weather, and the despair of local antiquarians, who assigned it at haphazard to the times when the Romans had an equestrian colony at Bielle. She was an old acquaintance of Trembloz, the mysterious lady who had been the subject of many a dream in his childhood. He contemplated her, however, for a moment, found her even a little more mutilated than of yore, an accident having carried off a piece of the head.

Then he returned home and set about visiting the house in detail. It was comfortable and spacious. The walls were newly papered, and had a fresh and pretty appearance. The rustic sash windows were not unpleasant. But the few pieces of furniture, which had just been brought in, made a sad figure in the spacious apartments, they were so humble, so insufficient. The parlor, particularly, looked empty, with its single sofa, its six chairs and two arm-chairs upholstered in green rep, ranged against the wall in melancholy symmetry, very far away from the little round table covered with a red cloth, which stood in the centre. The dining-room, utterly devoid of ornament, seemed to him to look even emptier, being more sombre.

The bedrooms were just such apartments as the poor live in. The only one that would have a livelier aspect would be the room in the second story, which he intended to make his study; it would, at least, contain books, the two or three hundred volumes in paper covers which he preserved with the greatest care. He reckoned on having them out of their boxes as soon as he had nailed up the deal benches which were to serve him for bookshelves. And then from his window, opening on a little balcony, along which a wistaria in flower was creeping, the view was superb; it stretched over the entire little lake, now of a blue as deep as that of the sky, in which the last mists of the morning were vanishing, while the jagged summits of the Alps, still half-veiled, overhanging the villages, steeples, fields and woods of Savoy, shut in the horizon with their snow-white peaks. Trembloz forgot himself for a moment in the contemplation of this magnificent picture. Then he broke away from it with an effort, and rambled about the house, smitten with that sadness which is experienced when we find ourselves in an entirely new atmosphere, where nothing that is a part of us yet lives. Never, certainly, had he been so well lodged; never, on the other hand, had he before now such a strong feeling of being at home, installed in a fixed position for a long time, or forever. As he became absorbed in this feeling, he told himself that he was now entering on a definite phase of his existence, and, since he was in the vein for reverie and the revival of early memories, he allowed his mind to wander backward.

He saw himself a child on the paternal farm, not far from his parish of to-day, in one of those rich villages planted among the vines of La Côte. At that time he had not a corner to himself, but was hunted from every quarter with his books by his eldest brother, who was always sneering at the sluggard, as he called him; treated by his people with an odd mixture of disdain and pride which in turn humbled and exalted him; for old Trembloz was a robust peasant, greedy after gain, inured to the hardest toil, and he despised this weakling son of his, who was useless in the fields; but he admired him also for the extraordinary ability which the regent acknowledged he possessed, and especially because he had a vague dream of "making something of him," a man of weight who should go far. These were, however, at first but passing fancies to which little Henri owed a few happy moments. Undoubtedly they would not have held good against the cost of his education but for the tenacity of his mother, more ambitious, more strong-willed and more intelligent also, who came to the resolution, from which she never swerved, of making a "Monsieur" of her son. "It costs dear, it is true," she said, "but after—" This word, full of the unknown, embraced all her hopes of a splendid future. Between the ambition of the mother and the hesitation of the father, which was renewed at each fresh expense, Henri grew up, knocked about from one side to the other, and was very wretched.

Often in a busy season he was forced to lay aside his

books and take a spade or scythe in his hands. Work was to be done, and he had to do it. These were evil days, for he hated tasks which interrupted his studies, besides exhausting and disgusting him. He hated them the more that he executed them badly, and thereby attracted the gibes of his brothers, who paid him back at these times for the superiority his education gave him over them.

"Much good your studies do you," they said to him, "eating up the money of the family, when they don't teach you even to hold a harrow properly!"

Such reasoning used to drive him mad, and he was in a state of deep affliction until he was allowed to return to the college in Bielle by the same road he had taken a few hours ago beside the hay-cart, by that highway of which he knew every one of the aspects, every winding and tree and bank and hedgerow, so often had he bedewed it with his sweat and scattered his dreams along the wayside. As a student he detested it, because he had to renew its acquaintance every morning and evening in spite of rain or heat, wind, snow or weariness. He left the college, therefore, with as little regret as he did the paternal acres, when he departed, later on, to pursue his studies at the Academy of Lausanne, then at Göttingen, where he stayed three semesters, and at Paris, where he spent a winter before his consecration.

There, too, other miseries lay in wait for him. He was always in need of money. And now, with his elbow resting on this balcony, which was his own,

lost in this far too spacious house, which the state was lending him for the term of his natural life, he was thinking of the poor garrets of his lonely youth. Some pleasant memories arose nevertheless from the ashes of the vanished years; his successful career as an industrious student, a success assured to him by an exceptional gift of eloquence, combined with an almost perfect memory; gifts valued by his teachers and which would have enabled him to shine in the first rank of his fellows, but for the modesty that held him back and the timidity that paralyzed him; a few friendships, warm and sincere, once regarded as eternal, and then dissipated by the chances of life, yet leaving behind them in the hearts they traversed some gracious and beneficent traces of their passage; once even, only once, a sweeter, tenderer sentiment, which had not had quite time to blossom and whose interrupted progress had found a halting-place in a melancholy that was without bitterness.

Henri dwelt fondly on these thoughts, not formulating any of them with precision, but abandoning himself to their capricious guidance; then, suddenly, he started; there came back to him with a rush the cruel sensation, the agony he felt on the day he quitted Paris, to take charge of the parish confided to him in the valley of Goux; it was the end of his liberty, his studies and his youth. Now he belonged to duty, to action. And so four years were passed in the gloomy valley, on the border of the sombre little lake which keeps and never gives back its mysterious waters; four years, with their

long winters, years as monotonous as the lines of the mountains that bound the narrow horizon, sad as the great forests of pine which the sunlight never enters, poorly filled up with the accomplishment of daily tasks. It was at the end of this long stage, just as he was about to be called to Bielle, that he lost his father. The old peasant died without leaving anything to his children, bad seasons having swallowed up the savings of good ones. Then his mother, whose daughters were at service and who was not on too good terms with her daughter-in-law, now mistress of the farm, declared she would fix herself at Bielle and "keep house for her son, the pastor."

Brought back to the preoccupations of the present hour, Henri was asking himself, in a vague sort of a way, how their life in common would be likely to turn out, when his mother returned, bearing with her a loaf and some parcels. The fatigue incidental to the laborious morning she had spent did not affect her. Trembloz, on the contrary, felt heavy-headed and tired, for he had risen too early and worked his muscles to excess, and the rattling of the hay-cart, beside which he had marched so long, was still sounding in his brain. But the old peasant, with all her sixty-five years, was as brisk as ever, ready for action, a little sour it is true, but because that was her natural disposition, and for no other reason. Squat, square-shouldered, built like a man, with knotty hands and straggling wisps of hair, still black, framing a face tanned by the succes-

sion of winds and rains and suns, she evoked the idea of a little gnarled oak, whose deep, solid, obstinate roots are determined on having the best of the neighboring trees. She was hardly in the room when she complained of the baker, who, for certain, was cheating in the weight; of the butcher, on whom she had called in passing, "just to get an idea of prices," and whose meat was tough; of the grocer, with one of whose shop-boys she had quarrelled. She grew excited in telling this episode:

"They think they can treat me as they like because I am only a peasant woman. But I'll teach them with whom they have to do. They shall see! They shall soon see! They shall see!"

CHAPTER III

Dreaming as Usual

SHE shook her hard head with a threatening air, every one of her sharp features seeming to cut like a knife. Trembloz listened peaceably, but with anxiety in his eyes. The terrible temper that he knew so well had come back again, and he had a fearful presentiment of the troubles that were looming in the future.

"I told them I was the mother of their new pastor," she continued. "Then they grew a little more polite. You understand, we must not let those people set their feet on our necks here. It is not like it was in the valley, where you were only a bird of passage, and where the regent had you under his thumb, as I have been told often enough. Here, my dear boy, you are likely to remain a long time. We have got to be respected! Yes, yes; even if we are only peasants! And everything depends on how we make a beginning. You know the proverb: 'As you make your bed, so you shall lie on it?'"

While speaking she was at work, so that the dinner was soon on the table. It was a simple repast; plates and glasses set on the bare table without any attention to arrangement or comfort.

"There!" she said, "you ought to be hungry, Henri! Eat, my lad! You will pay your first visit while I am giving the finishing touch to the house. And, mind you be careful of what you say. When you're in a town, you know, you must turn your tongue three times in your mouth before speaking."

She went on dinning similar prudent counsels into his ear the whole time he was eating.

He never answered. What could he say? His mother frightened him. He dreaded her awful guardianship; he never dared to think of contradicting her, or even of uttering the mild phrases of deprecation which he was pronouncing mentally. Yet he understood things quite differently from her; oh, yes, quite differently, indeed! He did not for a moment believe that at the very hour he was entering on his career and on the duties of his parish, he was really about to be set down in the centre of a circle of enemies whom he would have all the difficulty in the world to tame. Far from that, his parishioners were, in his eyes, friends. He came to them animated with the best intentions, entirely relieved from the reveries which, four years ago, toward the close of his studies, had given birth to unavailing regrets, and quite prepared to devote himself wholly to his noble task, without other ambition than that of advancing the kingdom of God, without other desire than that of fulfilling his duty. How little importance for him had the trifles which filled her soul! It was because, although pious after her fashion, her

mind, always more familiar with the harsher cares of existence, confounded the mission of a pastor with his social condition. She made for herself an absolute and formidable idea of God; she feared Him as a severe master whom nothing escapes and who has to be satisfied. Nevertheless, it was neither through love nor fear of this terrible Master, it was not to gain His indulgence nor to merit His favor that she had devoted her son to the ministry. On this point her calculations were those of the age; she wished Henri to be a faithful servant, but also a keen guardian of his own interests, like a good farmer, who, if he tills other people's fields, knows how to find his account in it. And as for him, under the sway as he was of his natural uprightness, of the candor and beauty of his soul, he had betaken himself to his task with complete disinterestedness, was forgetting the human aspects of his calling, and seemed ready to neglect his own interests to the exclusive profit of those of the Master. He must be warned then, recalled to order and guided. Seeing him distracted, she questioned him:

"What are you thinking of, Henri?"

He shook his head, with an uncertain gesture.

"Of nothing, mother."

"What! of nothing. Dreaming, as usual! Yes, as usual! However, this is not the time for it. Our arrival has been remarked, and every one knows that you are here. Oh, yes, I noticed the people following us a while ago. You did not see them, no indeed! You

never see anything. Well, we must not leave them time to gossip together about our furniture, which is poor enough. You will go, then, at once into the town and show yourself; make your round of visits, in fact! Call on the syndic first of all; yes, I think you ought to begin with him. And then, there is your colleague, M. Sordes — he is not far off. Only it would, perhaps, be better to wait a bit; they say he is rather jealous and a little malicious besides. I shall try to find out. You would do well, also, to make no delay in seeing M. Massod de Bussens, for whom you have a letter. It appears he is quite the influential man here."

These visits evidently alarmed Trembloz, for he inquired in a plaintive, although half-resigned tone:

"Do you really believe, mother, that I ought to see all these people to-day?"

"Why, certainly. Why put off till to-morrow what you can do to-day? But you would always wait and wait, and, at last, it would be too late. Well, have you done?"

"Yes. I am not hungry now."

"Then go and dress."

He rose without any hurry.

"Give me your overcoat until I brush it," she returned, "and your shoes; they want polishing. Oh! I forgot the blacking! One always forgets something. And now I must go back to the grocer's!"

She left him alone again. He would have liked to stroll around, doing nothing, spending his first day

in the kind of musing idleness to which he sometimes felt the need of giving way. But instead, he had to resist, discuss and encounter reproaches always; whatever he might do, the tranquillity that he loved, was imperilled. Better, then, to give way entirely. So he went obediently to make his toilet.

This was always a long operation in spite of Mother Trembloz, who disapproved of the excessive care some people took of their person. On this day he was even longer than usual; the fresh water did him good, chased away some of the vague torments that were beginning to harass him, and put him in an active humor once more.

"After all," he said to himself, "perhaps my mother is right. She does not know much of the world, but she has good sense. These ceremonious visits are necessary. Once they are complied with I shall be more at my ease. I shall also have a better idea of the sort of people I have to deal with and the ground on which I stand. Here goes, then! I will take the plunge!"

So that when she brought him his shoes and his overcoat, which, after a good brushing, did not seem too worn, he made no more resistance.

"Be very careful of what you say!" she warned him again as she arranged his necktie.

And, standing on the threshold, she followed him with her eyes until he had shut the gate of the yard, as if she was still afraid he might change his resolution.

As Henri was leaving the parsonage the clock in the Horloge struck one. This single stroke fell on the silence with prolonged vibrations. "It is too early to pay visits," said the young pastor to himself; and instead of moving in the direction of the syndic's residence, as his mother believed, he went to take a turn on the esplanade close by the church, happy at the chance of having a moment alone by himself.

The esplanade — Bielle is proud of it, and not without reason — is an elevated terrace, circular in shape, and planted with chestnut-trees, just at the head of the town, and terminating in a narrow promenade which runs round the ancient ramparts. From it the venerable gray-roofed little city descends between clumps of trees and flower gardens as far as the narrow path that skirts the borders of the lake. On the right a continuous chain of tufted woods and meadows, dotted with hamlets, unites the open country to the Jura, from whose severe outlines emerges the rounded summit of the Dôle, entirely white with the snows of winter even in summer. Towards the left, on the other side of the little lake, the villages and châteaux of Savoy are seen, scattered along the coast at the foot of the craggy peaks of the Alps, above which towers the colossal Mont Blanc, serene in its eternal repose, and living, under the play of light and shade, the mysterious life of its vast glaciers, while on the side of the horizon, hemmed in by the rugged Salève, the outlines of Geneva may be dimly discerned; on the other the lake widens, shines and

sparkles, and although fogs wrap up its shores, it takes on all the aspects of a calm and boundless sea. The chestnuts were beginning to flower in rosy or white bunches, the sky was clear, the warm vapors of spring were in the air; Trembloz leaned on the high parapet, so old and cracked, and while contemplating the scene, continued his reverie of the moment before. A thousand memories were brought back to him by these flowery chestnuts. How often, when a child, had he passed his hours of recreation under their shade, often by himself in a corner, with a book or with his thoughts, being one of those who like to be alone, and yet sometimes feeling drawn to the noisy games of his comrades. His comrades? — some were dead, others vanished, tutors in Russia or colonists in unknown lands: very few left in the town, in the houses where they were born. No doubt, he would find some of them again, would see them in front of him next Sunday among his parishioners; but what would they be to him, or he to them?

When he conversed with them they would revive some story of the past, a punishment in which they shared, a bad trick played on the Latin master, some adventure during an examination; then, having nothing further to say, they would begin to ask themselves if they had ever been really acquainted formerly, for, at bottom, they hardly recognized one another. Strange things those kinds of change! A few years pass; what is left of what we have been? We are moving shadows; at each halt of our life it is only by an effort that we are

enabled to become conscious of our individuality for the moment; it requires a still greater effort to connect our past, such as we recollect it, with our present self, to fix the mobile image of ourselves which is constantly wavering and vanishing. Trembloz was vainly trying, under these familiar trees, in the presence of this landscape his eyes had so often reflected, to recover his traits, his ideas, his sensations as a child; and his fanciful musings in retracing the past were lost in vagueness. He was no longer thinking; he let his soul become dissolved in the beauty of the scenes he was admiring, as if he had beheld them for the first time, and the empty moments were slipping by rapidly. A noise recalled him from the half-somnolent state into which he had sunk. The cavalcade he had encountered earlier in the day was returning. Although the slope in front of the esplanade was rather steep, the youngest of the riders put his horse to a trot. The others followed with careless and joyous laughter. They disappeared in a flash. Then Trembloz looked at his watch. It was half-past two. He could now call on M. Quartier.

CHAPTER IV

The Syndic's Warning

He left the esplanade regretfully, returned to the town, passing under the arch of an old ruined gateway, and continued his course along the main street, scrutinized inquisitively by an odd wayfarer or by shopkeepers who were for the moment disengaged and housewives who half opened their windows and followed him with their eyes; then he took a cross street on his left, leading to the railway station, passed over the track, and, a little farther on, at the entrance to the white highway going towards the Jura, he rang at the syndic's door. An instant after, a servant girl, of a somewhat countrified appearance, introduced him into the presence of M. Quartier, who received him with his usual familiar good-nature.

"Ah! it is you, M. le Pasteur! Charmed to see you, quite charmed! Come, now, what do you say to a glass?"

This offer is never refused in the Pays de Vaud. Trembloz bowed.

"Then you will excuse me a moment," said the syndic.

He left the room in order to select himself a bottle of

the choicest vintage, returned panting, opened it with a corkscrew, "a new invention," he said, as he explained its action to the pastor, then filled and touched the glasses.

"Your health, M. le Pasteur. What do you think of it?"

"Excellent!" said Henri, laying down his glass.

M. Quartier, who had emptied the half of his at one gulp, smacked his lips.

"Isn't it, now? It is a wine you need not have any doubts about. It comes from my own vineyards, La Côte, '80!"

Then they entered into conversation, which halted somewhat at first, the syndic concealing a little distrust under all his air of openness, and gazing at him in a searching way, which became more good-natured when he had thoroughly come to the conclusion that his guest was altogether candid and inoffensive. This evident candor, which never took the very necessary precaution of dissembling, even excited his pity a little, and, moved by a sudden kindly impulse, he determined to put him on his guard.

"Your post here is a difficult one, M. le Pasteur," he said, shaking his enormous red face. "Yes, very difficult! You must not expect that it will be all smooth sailing with you!"

Henri looked at him with a frank, loyal expression, which had nothing timid in it. "With God's help, M. le Syndic," he said, "I hope all will go well!"

M. Quartier nodded approval, but repeated, not without a smile of malicious irony:

"Yes, with God's help, with God's help."

Then, quite sure that he might speak without fear, he continued, with gestures that shook his burly frame:

"Ah! if we had only God to deal with! But there are men, M. le Pasteur! Our neighbor, as they say. Ha! ha! In this place, look you, it is rather a laborious job handling them. I can speak with some authority, for I have had the management of them for twenty years. Yes, I have been their syndic for twenty years, and it is twenty-five since I began to represent them in the Grand Council. The great misfortune of our town, look you, is the jealousies, hostilities and quarrels that divide us. Now, it will be your place to keep the peace between hostile camps. But you'll see before long how it is! Children at daggers drawn with their parents, neighbors never easy unless they have a lawsuit on hand! You will often be called on to arrange matters, and it will require tact, ever so much tact! And then—"

He stopped, as if to give more importance to what was about to follow, shut his snuff-box with an abrupt gesture, and, with a resounding sneeze that brought the tears to his eyes, burst forth:

"And then, your colleague is a very unpleasant customer! I must tell you everything—"

This terrible revelation launched, he continued:

"Oh! it is not because I have been on bad terms

with M. Sordes for the last six years that I tell you this. No, I pride myself on being a broad-minded man. I am tolerant; but that servant of God has a temper! Good heavens! what a temper! He has been the cause of five pastors leaving here already. Yes, monsieur, five pastors, every one of whom was a better man than himself — although, to be sure, the last, your predecessor — well, let us not speak of him; it is better so!" And he grew still more animated as he explained:

"M. Sordes, you see, cannot settle down quietly to be only the second pastor of the parish and rummage the outskirts of the town in search of hearers and contributions for his poor, while his colleague has all he needs under his hand — church flock, hospital, everything, in fine! Ever since he came he has been ambitious to be first pastor. Every time there is a vacancy he intrigues, dreams of nothing else, loses his appetite on account of it. But we'll never nominate him, ah! ha! Never, as long as I am in Bielle! Second pastor he is, second pastor he shall live, second pastor he shall die. That's the way the land lies, monsieur!"

He struck his knee with his fist, breathed heavily, and resumed with a little more calmness:

"What I am telling you is, after all, simply meant as a caution. Afterwards, nom de nom! you will find things out for yourself. Have you any relatives here, any acquaintances?"

The vehemence of M. Quartier had its effect on Trembloz, and he answered, timidly:

"There ought to be some school-fellows of mine here, M. le Syndic. But I have lost sight of them for a long time. I think, however, I may find them again. And then, I have a letter of introduction one of my friends gave me for M. Massod de Bussens."

The countenance of M. Quartier cleared: "M. Massod de Bussens, oh! ho!" he exclaimed. "That is very well, indeed! A man of high distinction, you know. The first family of Bielle, an old family, and noble if there ever was one; it played a great part in the time of the Bernese. Along with that, a thoroughly good man! He has a charming wife, who takes her share in all our works of charity. Few people are like them at the present day! If you please them, they will do much to make your path very easy. If you have their support you need not fear anything. Oh, by the way, I should like to impress on you that M. Massod de Bussens is a man who likes to have attention and respect paid him. You would do well to go and see him at once."

"I was even thinking of calling on him to-day."

"You were right, M. le Pasteur, you were right. You know where he lives?"

"Yes, I know his 'campagne' of old."

"M. Massod de Bussens is very much respected. If he takes your part, oh! nom de nom! if he takes your part, mustn't M. Sordes look out for himself!"

And M. Quartier began rubbing his hands, with a loud laugh, while Trembloz, scared at finding that,

without ever having anticipated such a thing, he was the centre of a conflict of interests, gazed at him with a frightened air. The syndic misunderstood the meaning of this troubled look.

"I hope you have understood me clearly?" he continued. "You are young, a new-comer, not yet known, and, therefore, a little mistrusted. That is very natural, is it not? Good will does not run along the streets, you know, here nor anywhere else. The question for us is to make our conquest, M. le Pasteur, ha, ha!"

"With God's help!" replied Trembloz, rising. The syndic did not let him go without filling his glass again, which he had to empty, and conducted him to the door with more real kindness and less familiarity. Then, before returning to his business, he went to communicate his impressions of the new pastor to his wife. A picturesque phrase, such as sometimes occurred to him, summed them up.

"A lamb, my darling, that has not enough strength for defence, but enough wool already for shearing."

Trembloz had to return the same road he came, and pass the battery of the same eyes that observed him with the same malevolent curiosity. Leaving this time the esplanade on his left, he descended the steep road which runs down to meet the highway to Geneva. After following it for a few minutes he found himself in front of the "campagne," or country seat, of Massod de Bussens.

CHAPTER V

Massod de Bussens

It was a rather imposing-looking white mansion, pierced by a multitude of windows with green shutters. An opulent abundance of wistarias rioted along the numerous balconies in all the gayety of April, and a square turret, surmounted by a weather-cock, gave it a somewhat castellated appearance, marred, however, by the stables and outhouses connected with it by a common yard, so that it had more the air of a farm.

At the moment Trembloz was crossing the yard behind the servant who had admitted him, and to whom he had already handed his letter, an enormous mastiff rushed towards him, barking. He could not repress a gesture of fear, for, in spite of the servant, the dog kept on growling, when he heard a woman's voice calling:

"Nestor! here, Nestor!"

The brute immediately bounded away. Trembloz perceived at the other end of the yard a young woman in a white dress and light hat, holding a little boy by the hand. Thinking she was looking at him, he was about to raise his hat. But she turned aside, caressed the dog,

which ran up at her call, and disappeared with him. It was scarcely more than a passing vision, which, however, left in his eyes a sort of sketch, vaguely outlined, of a charming little domestic picture.

He was introduced into a very simple drawing-room, where, while awaiting the master of the house, he examined the unpretentious furniture, upholstered in red velvet, the white curtains framing the windows, and particularly the pictures decorating the walls; reproductions of pious or national subjects, such as Gleyre's "Romans Passing under the Yoke," or Ary Scheffer's "St. Augustine and His Mother." He was opening an illustrated volume, the "Album de la Suisse romaine," when M. Massod de Bussens entered with outstretched hands and an air of benevolence and protection.

He was a man of forty-five or thereabouts, with bald forehead, prominent eyes and a face framed in a thick beard just beginning to get gray. He was tall and stout, with a slow and almost solemn expression. All his person betrayed that entire self-satisfaction, that certainty of one's own importance, that consciousness of being always right, which the unanimous esteem of all within reach of its influence, regularity of habits and the solidity of a hereditary position give to a mind that has never stirred outside of its natural limits.

"I knew you would come this evening, M. le Pasteur," he said, in a monotonous voice, to which the accent of his native place gave a drawling and sing-song

intonation. "But I did not expect you so soon. You are hardly yet installed, are you?"

Henri, in presence of this personage, became very humble and timid, under the sudden sense of all that he lacked — early training, ease of manner and readiness of language. He answered hesitatingly:

"Yes, monsieur, I only arrived this morning, but my installation was not very complicated. My mother took charge of it."

He smiled modestly, as if asking pardon for being poor.

"And now," returned M. Massod de Bussens, affably, "you are making your round of visits. It was very kind of you to begin with me — for I am the first, I imagine."

"No — no, monsieur — I have already seen M. le Syndic — "

The countenance of M. Massod did not express any dissatisfaction.

"Ah! ah!" he said, "you do not waste your time. An amiable man, our syndic. You did well to see him at once; he likes people to show him attention. And then, his advice is worth listening to; not the less so that he is very free with it. I presume he has given you a good deal of information about your new parishioners?"

"Yes, monsieur, some — "

"Good! Good! And it has been encouraging?"

"Not excessively, monsieur, I confess."

M. Massod de Bussens smiled in a superior manner.

"Yes, it is true M. Quartier is somewhat of a pessimist. He sees the worst side of people; the simplest things seem difficult to him — But we must not take all that is said literally, no, no! I have quite as much experience as he, M. le Pasteur. I also know our town and our fellow-citizens well, I assure you. You can believe me then, when I tell you that things are not as bad as he must have represented to you. Ah! I do not claim that people are better in Bielle than anywhere else. Good heavens, no! You find the same faults here as in other places. Men are men the world over, are they not? But there are no difficulties which you cannot overcome with firmness and energy, and, above all" — here he raised his arm and swept the air with an authoritative gesture — "with the sentiment of duty. Ah! monsieur, duty! Everything is there! Too often, alas! is this truth, which is so simple, forgotten in our days; this is the source of many of our evils. Your duty is to recall the fact to us incessantly from the height of the pulpit."

M. Massod de Bussens spoke in a solemn tone and as if he was listening to himself. He stopped, waiting for the reply, which did not come, Trembloz not finding anything to censure in the discourse, and not knowing in what terms to express his approval. After a silence, he continued, in a tone the gravity of which contrasted with the familiarity of the offer:

"You will please accept a glass of wine, monsieur, will you not?"

Henri refused.

"No, thank you, monsieur. M. le Syndic has already invited me, and I — I should be — afraid — "

M. Massod approved by a gesture and a smile.

"Well, well! I will not press you. The glass of wine is one of our bad customs. I see, with pleasure, you are not like your predecessor, who never declined! With this exception he was an excellent man, and worthy of all respect. You will doubtless hear much ill spoken of him, but do not pay any attention to it. There is much exaggeration about the matter, monsieur; much exaggeration indeed!"

There was silence for a moment; it was broken by M. Massod inquiring, with an air of greater protection than ever:

"Pray, where did you prosecute your studies, M. le Pasteur?"

"At Lausanne, monsieur."

"You have never left the country, then?"

"Yes, monsieur, I have passed two semesters in Germany and one at Paris."

"Very good, indeed! It is proper that a man of your profession should know other countries besides his own. I hope, however — allow me to speak to you in all frankness — that your travels have not — "

He emphasized these words, at the same time smiling with an air he thought shrewd and diplomatic:

"Broadened your mind — beyond measure, of course. Oh! I am not narrow, like many, certainly, whom you will find among your flock. No, no! I am not narrow-minded; far from it, indeed! But I am not very fond of new ideas, in theology, particularly. God never changes, does he, now? Why, then, should we change the idea we have formed of him? But, without having a detailed knowledge of your opinions, monsieur, I am aware — and that is the essential point — that you have no love for the doctrines of the liberal theologians and have remained still faithful to our old orthodoxy."

"Nothing could be truer, monsieur," acquiesced Trembloz, firmly.

"I congratulate you."

Then, shaking his head and in an aggrieved tone of voice:

"Your predecessor could not have said as much. He had excellent qualities of heart, generosity, devotion and ardor. But what opinions, monsieur! What opinions! Oh, let us not speak of them. You will do better than he did, I am sure, for, with faith and the sentiment of duty, there is no task too heavy. You are armed for yours, monsieur, and you shall not want for support, I promise you."

Trembloz rose to take leave. M. Massod kept him a moment, then, when he rose for the second time, he accompanied him to the door. As Henri noticed a big heap of stones, while crossing the yard, which was a blot on the otherwise orderly appearance of the place,

his companion stopped a moment to say, with an air of sanctimonious complacency:

"It is for the poor!"

Seeing an expression of some astonishment on the face of the pastor, he continued:

"You do not understand, monsieur? I must explain. We have many beggars here. Now I am against almsgiving. It humiliates, it degrades; consequently I make them carry the stones, in the barrow standing yonder, from the garden to the yard and back again from the yard to the garden. And I pay them for their labor. That is true charity, monsieur, as I understand it, and as all should!"

He was so sure he was right that he did not wait for an answer.

CHAPTER VI

The Good Pastor

WHILE returning to town by the beautiful road, now bright with sunshine, Trembloz fell to thinking of the species of orthodox profession of faith he had just made. He had answered in all sincerity, without a shadow of hesitation. And yet — good heavens! he was not troubled with doubts; the notion that he was would have made him smile, but he recalled — what elusive connection of ideas brought them before him suddenly? — certain bad hours of his spiritual life when the scaffolding of his beliefs had staggered on its base. This took place long ago, in those years of his first youth, when, the character not being yet formed, the mind has certain daring impulses, which, if not overcome at a special moment, alter the whole course of life and change its aims. God, the soul, goodness, duty, these precise terms then lost their meaning for a time; sounded in the ear as hollow words; no longer represented to his mind aught but a vague ocean of uncertainties, befogged with anguish. Then he came out a victor, standing on firm ground, braving the floods; the crisis was over. Why, then, did the memory of this

period recur to him on the day that marked the starting-point of a new phase of his existence? Why did he feel a return of those shocks to-day, useless and even dangerous, for his thoughts, no more than his life, belonged any longer to himself? The age of doubt, discussion and investigation was gone; henceforward he must act. Once the battle was on, what officer would set about reflecting whether his country had right on her side or his leader was virtuous? And, banishing these vain thoughts, he started briskly to call on the president of the parish council, who received him pleasantly and courteously; then on the prefect, who was out. After this he took the road to the parsonage again.

He found his mother busy cleaning the house in her work-a-day petticoat, with the sleeves tucked up on her dry, brown, parchment-like arms. She paused in her task to question him.

He gave a brief summary of his travels. She cast a malevolent glance at the house of her neighbors:

"From all I hear," she broke forth, "you've got a nice kind of colleague there. He has a temper, he has! Oh, yes, one of those tempers, you know, that make a man impossible! The whole town, therefore, detests him. They say he fought with your predecessor, yes, fought in this very yard. He got a sound thump in the eye, and every one played the bad joke on him of coming to inquire how he was getting on. And M. Pidoux, the apothecary, who can't bear him, sent him a

big pot of ointment! And his wife, a regular magpie, by all accounts! She was a rich cousin; he had not a sou to his name; he married her for her money. And doesn't she drive him! They have only a daughter, who is three-quarters idiot. She is still a child, but she is not ill-natured, poor girl. Indeed, she is the best of the batch!"

She related her discoveries in a tone of triumph, as if she was equally happy in having made so many and in finding them all detestable.

"How do you know all this?" asked Trembloz.

"From their cook! I saw her go out a few minutes ago on some errands. I joined her at once. As an excuse for talking with her I asked her who was her butcher. Then we got into a conversation. I perceived she liked nothing better than to speak of her employers. And you may be sure I profited by the chance!"

Her son gazed at her with an air of consternation.

"Do you mean to tell me, mother," he cried, "that you gossip with the servants of my colleague?"

"Why not?"

"What! Is there any need for me to explain myself? You are not a servant surely! You must put yourself on a footing of perfect equality with the Sordes family. What respect can Mme. Sordes have for you if she learns that you listen to the tittle-tattle of her cook?"

Mme. Trembloz reflected a moment, for she had not looked at this side of the question.

"Perhaps you are right," she said. "Although, as for equality, you know, when one comes from the country and is only a peasant — well, well, no matter! You ought to know these things better than me. For the future I'll be on my guard."

"Moreover," he resumed, "I do not want you to do household work. I do not like to see you in the dress of a servant."

"Still, some one has to clean up the house and do the cooking."

"Naturally; so we shall hire a domestic."

This time she protested.

"Oh! what should we do with one?"

Her old head refused to take in the idea that she should be waited on, after spending so many years in the rough toil of the farm.

"In that case, why should I stay here? I did not come 'to play the lady'; I am not so old as to be no longer fit for anything."

She grumbled a little further; then, when Henri repeated in a decided tone: "We shall hire a domestic," she was silent, but with an obstinate expression, and swearing in her own mind that she would not hear of it. A domestic, indeed! Well, let him get one, since he was bent on it; he might find her, perhaps, but as to keeping her, that was another affair! She ended with the order:

"Go now and call on your colleague." Trembloz sighed:

"Do you think, really, that it is necessary for me to go to-day?"

"Surely! Do not begin with showing him disrespect! He is at home now. I saw him return an hour ago."

Henri made a gesture of resignation, smoothed his hat with the sleeve of his overcoat, and proceeded to ring the bell of the house next door.

He found the Sordes family assembled in the parlor, an apartment upholstered in green, homely and dull, with stiff, thick curtains that arrested the passage of the light, so that one scarcely distinguished the ornaments of the room through the half-shadow — a black marble timepiece, surmounted by a bronze, on the mantel, between two Empire candelabra, the tapers of which were seldom lit, and on the walls reproductions of religious paintings, Christs walking on the water or teaching the doctors of the law. Mme. Sordes, in front of a round table, was busy with some piece of embroidery. Jeanne, in a corner, motionless, with arms hanging listlessly and eyes devoid of expression, staring fixedly yet vaguely, kept the careless pose she affected and which no one dreamed any longer of disturbing her in. Near the window, the pastor, wearing a velvet skullcap on a head half-hidden by the shirt collar, with white cravat and spectacles on nose, was reading the local journal, all the time moving his lips up and down. He rose all of a piece, saluted his visitor ceremoniously, offered his hand, but without any cordiality, and presented him.

"My new colleague, M. Henri Trembloz, — Mme. Sordes, Mlle. Sordes." Mme. Sordes rose in her turn, with a movement like that of her husband, drew herself up to her full height, which was not much, to look as imposing as possible, and made a salutation in which there was no hostility, but a little disdain, while Jeanne bent forward a moment and then resumed her impassive attitude.

"Pray sit down, monsieur," said M. Sordes, pointing to an armchair.

They remained seated, looking at one another for a few moments, without speaking.

Trembloz felt it was his part to break this embarrassing silence. He stammered, a prey to a sudden attack of timidity, that made his voice tremble:

"I felt bound, — M. le Pasteur, to — to present my respects to you on my arrival."

M. Sordes contented himself with replying: "Very much obliged, I am sure, monsieur, very much obliged."

Mme. Sordes sighed and said, in a little sharp-pitched voice, that seemed to tear her thin lips apart:

"My husband is not accustomed to much attention on the part of his colleagues."

"Indeed," said M. Sordes, "I have had but ill-luck with the pastors that have succeeded one another in Bielle for the last thirty years, — for I have been here thirty years, — thirty years, monsieur."

He was silent an instant, then in a tone that changed the meaning of his words:

"But I hope that with you, monsieur, matters may go on better. I sincerely hope so."

"Be assured, monsieur, — that everything — which depends on me —" stammered Henri, who was not able to finish his sentence.

Melted a little by his evident good-will, Mme. Sordes replied:

"Oh, if you do everything that depends on you, monsieur, you may be quite sure it is not from our side that difficulties will come!"

"No; most decidedly not," returned M. Sordes. "Have no doubt on that point. We are peaceable folk, in this house at least. We know what our duties are, our duties as Christians! 'Love one another,' said the Saviour. We ask nothing better than to love our neighbor, monsieur — But!" —

He prolonged this menacing "but," emphasizing its meaning by shaking his chin up and down several times with a significant gesture. And again there was silence, this time so heavy that it seemed something material. Trembloz sought desperately for some words to utter. He did not find them; every second, his embarrassment increased. It appeared to him as if his head became emptier, his tongue heavier. M. Sordes seemed absorbed in his reflections, Mme. Sordes was keeping on the defensive in a rather perplexing way. As for Jeanne, she might as well have been absent. Her gaze, however, met that of the visitor for a moment. She examined him inquisitively; then she rose slowly, with a

gesture at once gentle and easy, contrasting strongly with the stiff attitude of her parents, came and sat down beside her mother, then whispered:

"Mamma, who is that gentleman?"

Mme. Sordes answered in the same manner:

"The new pastor."

"Ah! Will he be as spiteful as the other one?"

"Hush! you don't know what you are saying!"

"He looks as if he might be good."

Trembloz barely guessed they were speaking of him. As he turned his head aside to avoid watching them, his eyes fell on a piano covered up in a cashmere shawl.

He asked mechanically:

"Is mademoiselle a musician?"

This awkward question irritated Mme. Sordes, who answered dryly:

"No, monsieur, our daughter is not a musician, not at all!"

Jeanne, whose eyes were again beginning to wander vaguely around, murmured:

"I am nothing."

And there was silence again, until Trembloz, having succeeded in uttering a few phrases and obtaining an answer from M. Sordes, was able at last to rise and take his leave.

It was the second Sunday after his arrival that judgment was pronounced on Trembloz by his parishioners. His installation on the previous Sabbath had passed off as such services usually do, with speeches that seemed

interminable, and a banquet, given to the personages in authority by the new pastor. The little discourse which he had delivered, short, sober and embarrassed, left his hearers in doubt; some remarked also that the dinner was not what it might have been.

CHAPTER VII

Before the Battle

"HE does what he can," said M. Quartier. "He is not rich; that may not prevent him perhaps from being a good minister!"

And it was decided to wait for the decisive test of the first sermon.

And so, on that Sunday, long before the bell summoned the faithful, animated groups were discussing the subject around the old temple. Their faces expressed disappointment, for it is no small affair that of getting a new pastor, a pastor who for twenty years perhaps, or more, will be associated with all the affairs of life, and will have to be listened to every Sunday. These anxious people were saying to one another: "What if we have made a bad choice?" And they were recalling the circumstances that had preceded the election and made it necessary.

"Another blunder of Quartier's," declared M. Rabourin, who was gesticulating in the centre of one of the groups. M. Tiercet, who never ventured on a declaration, shook his little bird-like head, and said in a conciliating tone: "Perhaps our delegates of the parish council have been a little inconsiderate."

"Well," cried M. Marquillier, the director of the college, a handsome man, freshly shaved, very correct, and very important, "one thing they might easily have taken notice of, and that is, that this pastor is utterly without dignity of manner or distinction of deportment!"

The syndic, who was approaching with his heavy step, heard these last words:

"That doesn't hinder him," he exclaimed in his strongest voice, "from knowing how to preach passably well. Yes, yes, yes; the sermon we heard yonder in the valley was magnificent, magnificent, I tell you, nom de nom!"

M. Rabourin, insinuatingly:

"Perhaps it wasn't his own, was it?"

"Do you take pastors, then, for collegians, who crib at their examinations?" bellowed the syndic, with an exaggeration of his customary manner to hide his anxiety.

But M. Rabourin did not become in the least disconcerted.

"He has thrown dust in your eyes, that's all! He got his sermon written for him by a complaisant comrade — or stole it out of a book with which nobody is acquainted. Such things happen every day, and it is always clever people like our friend that fall into the trap!"

The bystanders applauded.

"Well, for that matter, we shall soon see; we shall soon see how he'll stand the test," said M. Tiercet.

"He won't stand it badly," said M. Marquillier, with

a sly smile, "if he does not speak any worse than M. Sordes himself."

"Hush!"

M. Sordes, who had just left the parsonage with his wife and daughter, crossed the square, returning the salutes that greeted him, and entered the temple.

"There is one of them who has fleeced us nicely!" exclaimed M. Rabourin, following him with his eyes, "and that has lasted for thirty years!"

"And it is not going to end soon, either; oh, no!" said M. Marquillier.

"Truly, it was well worth our while to give him a companion!" rejoined Rabourin.

"But, nom de nom, can't you wait awhile!" protested the syndic.

At this moment the group had to stand aside to make way for the victoria of the Massods de Bussens, who got out in front of the church. Then the general discontent was expressed in new sarcasms. Up to now the syndic had to fight his battle alone. He did so feebly enough, with the enervated authority of a brave man, who is not quite sure he is right, and shouts as loud as he can to give himself courage. But he received support from an unexpected quarter — from no less a person than Dr. Mathorel — a skeptic, an inventor of paradoxes, not yet cured of his vagaries by his thirty-five years, and who, although the freedom of his language had already cost him several patients, still continued to terrify the town by the independence of his views.

He arrived, dressed in free and easy fashion, as usual, with his hands in the pockets of his open jacket and his necktie carelessly knotted. He threw himself at once into the conversation.

"After all, what do you know about him?" he asked. "You are all ready to fling stones at him. At least wait till you have some reason. His overcoat is ill-made, his furniture is by no means princely; that is all you have to reproach him with so far. What does all that prove? Does your God make a difference between the rich and the poor? Was not Jesus the son of a carpenter? Along with that, I can see for myself that this young man has a good head on his shoulders. And those who heard him preach tell me his sermon—"

"His sermon!" interrupted M. Rabourin; "his sermon! It was not his; his sermon, indeed!"

Mathorel shrugged his shoulders.

"A fine story that is!" he retorted. "Who has told it to you?"

"Everybody knows it. Now, what have you to say for yourself?" exclaimed the hatter.

"Allow me," began M. Quartier.

But the doctor cried louder still:

"Yes, yes; everybody knows it. But I know how all this idle gossip is fabricated in our precious little society; some one advances an entirely gratuitous supposition, the product of his own brain, without even suspecting that he is doing a dirty action; another repeats it as a thing probable enough; a third as something

quite certain; then there is no longer any doubt. And you call yourselves Christians!"

The doctor had two hobbies, both exasperating enough in their way; one consisted in speaking ill of Bielle, and cursing the destiny that ever led him to put his foot in it; the other in reproaching its inhabitants with their lack of piety, and yet he himself, according to his own confession, believed neither in God nor the devil! Once launched on this incline, there was no stopping him.

"But, really, doctor, what concern is it of yours," inquired Rabourin, "whether we have a good pastor or a bad one, since you never put a foot inside the church?"

"Well, you see, I am going to do so to-day!"

"Through curiosity?"

"Like the rest of you! Do you come for any other reason? Be candid, Rabourin! It is love of God, perhaps, that has thrown all the town into disorder to-day, is it?"

And he pointed a finger to the crowd that was increasing in numbers every moment and surging to the church porch.

"Look," he continued, "even the dissenters have come, and you see yonder the very pillars of the free church."

"And atheists too," growled M. Marquillier.

"Why, what a throng, indeed," said the syndic, shading his eyes.

At this moment a young man of a sharp, wide-awake appearance, half peasant and half citizen, saluted M. Tiercet respectfully, and received a nod in return. It was his clerk, Joseph Morand, a youth who had all his confidence, but whose religious opinions left much to be desired.

"No one is likely to reject the invitation to come and hear the preacher," said the notary, looking after the new arrival, who seemed at once embarrassed and contemptuous as he entered the church. "If we wait much longer, we shall not find seats."

And he prudently separated from his companions, who followed him.

CHAPTER VIII

The Pastor's Triumph

It was not without considerable trouble that they reached their pews in front of the pulpit, a very simple construction of varnished wood, surmounted by a green canopy. There was no longer a vacant seat on any of the benches. People were standing packed in the aisles. The whisperings of the crowd almost drowned the voice of the precentor, who, according to custom, was reading a passage from the Bible. There was a murmur of curiosity, speedily hushed, when the new pastor made his entrance, quite pale, in his black gown, walking with a faltering step and looking at no one.

He ascended the pulpit, read the prayers of the liturgy in a voice he had much difficulty in controlling, indicated the psalm to be sung and then assumed a posture of meditation. None of his movements escaped the seven or eight hundred pairs of eyes fastened on him, while from inattentive lips issued the sacred words:

> "How blessed are they who evil shun
> And tread the paths of innocence."

When his fingers, resting on the pulpit, trembled and

a shiver was seen now and then to run through his whole frame, some voices whispered:

"He is afraid!"

The words went from row to row. M. Massod de Bussens, with friendly anxiety, whispered them into the ear of the syndic and nearly scared him into fits; M. Marquillier murmured them to M. Tiercet, his left-hand neighbor, who did not allow a feature to betray his feelings, and to his right-hand neighbor, Dr. Mathorel, who shrugged his shoulders disdainfully, answering:

"Not very likely!"

The average feeling was anything but charitable; on the contrary, most of the congregation rather enjoyed the terror they inspired; they felt a little pride in their power, and with the pride was mingled some of that natural cruelty which makes men feel pleased with the evil they see others suffering on their account. On the women's benches there was more pity; the sight of that pale, anxious face that towered above the assembly and seemed to implore a little indulgence, a little sympathy, melted them; they said to one another: "How timid he looks!" or "How pale he is!" So compassionate were they that certain among them, like Mme. Massod de Bussens and her neighbor, Mlle. Surgeat, felt themselves really crushed by his anguish, and were so distracted and breathless that they could not mingle their voices with those of the choir, a somewhat discordant body, led by the vigorous falsetto of the precentor, a bald, squat, corpulent gray-beard, who beat the measure with

his hymn-book, puffing between every syllable. Mme. Trembloz was the only one who did not share in the general emotion. She was sure of her son; she admired him; she was waiting until he began, with the tranquil patience of an old peasant woman, to whom the succession of seasons and of harvests has slowly taught the lesson that everything comes in its hour.

However, the hymn was finished, Trembloz rose, passed his hand over his forehead, stammered the words of the liturgy that precede the text, and then the text itself, recovering some of his strength as he uttered the words of God:

"My life is not precious to me, provided that I finish my course with joy and the ministry which I have received from the Lord Jesus to render testimony to the Gospel of the grace of God."

When he shut the big Bible it was observed that he had no notes before him. At once fresh remarks were interchanged:

"He has no notes."

"He knows it by heart."

"Or does he improvise?"

"Oh! oh!"

He began very slowly, as if he was seeking for his words, in a weak voice, without gestures; and then gradually his voice grew stronger, became sonorous, filled the vault of the old temple, while apt and powerful gestures evidenced the sense of every phrase, and he himself, as in the times when tongues of fire rained on

the apostles, appeared transfigured. Once more the great mysterious power of the word wrought its miracle. All that a moment ago had been shabby or pitiable in the poor pastor was effaced in a kind of radiance. He was no longer the humble peasant, shamefaced and fearful; he was the minister of God; he looked beautiful, the beauty being of that divine and sorrowful cast which the Christs engraved by Rembrandt have among the money-lenders of the Temple; a beauty that won him at a bound every heart in the place. The whisperings were hushed, nobody stirred; breathless, stupefied, transfixed, they followed, or tried to follow, the lofty flight of the thoughts through noble phrases and fine images. The men looked at one another to see might they venture to express their satisfaction, making an effort to retain possession of their free will; the syndic Quartier, who, a thing very unusual with him, did not fall asleep this time, lay back gaping, his open mouth like a great hole in the centre of his big, red face, his enormous stomach quivering in front of him; Dr. Mathorel was triumphant from the beginning, embracing the congregation disdainfully now and then in a sweeping glance which said as plainly as words can tell: "Was I not right, you heap of idiots?" But, after a while, he leant forward, hypnotized like the rest, as if to drink of the living waters of the holy words. M. Pidoux, having taken off his golden spectacles, held them in his hand, forgetting that he could hardly see without them; M. Sordes, whose eyes were half shut, was moving his

lips rapidly; the notary Tiercet, the impassive, might have been made of wood, for all the expression in his face, but for two big tears that ran down his parchment cheeks.

As to the women, always unresisting when eloquence exercises its power, they assumed poses that expressed their transports, bit their pocket-handkerchiefs, tried to keep back their sobs, to stifle the sighs that shook their being. Mme. Massod de Bussens, from whose cheeks the blood had vanished, seemed in a faint; little Mlle. Surgeat beside her, old and wrinkled like a parchment that has suffered from damp, drew up her figure, twisted out of all shape by her rheumatism, her humble countenance shining with rapture; Mme. Sordes closed her eyelids as if she was about to die, while her cheeks were as red as if they were on fire. The mother of the pastor alone remained a stranger to this enthusiasm, which she observed without being carried away by it; her little eyes were darting piercing glances in all directions, questioning every face and not losing a single detail of the triumph.

However, Trembloz, indifferent to this immense effect, still went on, without failure or weakness, as if borne by an invisible force, not perhaps being even conscious that he was surpassing himself, — that he was touching the loftiest heights of eloquence; for this discourse, long since meditated, was but in reality the echo of his whole interior life; it embraced his inmost thoughts and hopes, the gropings of his faith in the

past, strengthened in its weaker hours by those secret suggestions which believing souls receive as coming immediately from God; it told of the sacrifice he had made of his being, represented in his eyes by the holy ministry he had accepted, — his noble intentions, his devotion and his immense desire of doing good. He had poetic images, mystical ardors, flashes of love that suddenly disclosed and illuminated his heart, — that poor heart, filled with the tenderness of a man already ripe, who had never lived except by the spirit. Moreover, his own improvisation intoxicated him. He did not follow his plan, the three parts of which overlapped one another, he did not calculate his digressions, he did not measure his images. However, when he finished his peroration, although he had far exceeded the ordinary limits of a sermon, all his hearers felt, as he did himself, that he had hardly spoken more than a few minutes.

CHAPTER IX

It is the Gift of God

He sat down. A long shiver ran through the assembly, and at the same time every one felt the need of some room for the expression of emotion. They could not applaud, but their whole being uttered a hurrah! They looked in one another's faces, exchanged words of admiration, brief eloquent exclamations. During the liturgy, the last canticle, the benediction, they gradually grew more composed. Several, as they regained possession of themselves, with their old ideas, judgments and prejudices, felt a little ashamed over the kind of suspension of their personality they had undergone, and were dreaming of a reaction. They were trying to form for themselves a free opinion, to discover some critical formula which would veil their defeat. During the canticle a few murmurs were already heard.

"It is very fine, but—" thus opening the door for any number of disparaging limitations. After leaving the church the people were divided into two camps, almost as soon as they began to interchange their impressions; some, the smaller number, admired unconditionally, still as enthusiastic as men can be who have

left a feast satiated after the banquet is over; the others, hesitating, admired also, no doubt, but were ready to bring in reservations. Among the latter was M. Rabourin, who had counted on a check that would have strengthened him in his opposition to the syndic; he went beyond all bounds.

"What has he said, after all?" he asked, of a group he had just joined, "What has he said? Come, now, I defy you to give an account of his sermon. Phrases, nothing but phrases! nothing but phrases!"

But Dr. Mathorel got angry. "Be silent! Hold your tongue! Phrases, indeed! Well, phrases are not a bad thing, either, when they are beautiful!"

M. Quartier triumphed. "We knew it, we fellows who heard him before; we knew it well! Ah, ah! Nom de nom! Didn't we know it? And we let you talk on. Not such idiots as you thought us, eh? You put your foot in it nicely, Rabourin, didn't you, now? Never judge people by appearances, Rabourin; the advice is good, though it isn't new. Now you see what we have done. And we have got a pastor who hasn't his equal in the Canton!"

Other groups were formed on the little square. M. Massod de Bussens was talking with M. Marquillier under the porch of the church, while his wife was receiving in front of her carriage the courteous salutations of Mme. Sordes, whose daughter, in her usual motionless attitude, looked as if she were still plunged in ecstasy.

"What talent for speaking!" Mme. Sordes was repeating. "What talent! Where can he have got it? For he belongs to a very small village, and his mother is only a peasant woman — what talent!"

Jeanne stammered stupidly:

"I could never have believed — that a sermon — could have been so beautiful!"

Her mother nudged her elbow, while Mme. Massod de Bussens, who had not yet said anything, murmured, as if she was speaking to herself:

"And his voice! Oh, that voice!"

A little surprised by the words and the tone, but already brought back to the consideration of things in the practical order, Mme. Sordes asked:

"Do you know what Mlle. Surgeat thinks, madame?"

For the opinion of the old maiden lady, a sometime governess of Russian princes, whom the death of a distant relative had suddenly enriched, was held in high esteem; she was the object of the tenderest attentions, for she was known to be without family, and her fine fortune must fall some day either to the institutions she patronized or, perhaps, even to some of her dearest friends. Modest to excess, having retained from her long servitude a timidity always ready to take alarm, benevolent and self-denying to an extent her neighbors were far from believing, Mlle. Surgeat used her influence solely for the purpose of doing good. As she had gone away at once after the services closed, forgetting

in her hurry to make the salutation expected of her, Mme. Massod de Bussens could not answer Mme. Sordes, who went on:

"Yes, it is marvellous! truly marvellous!" And as her husband approached, conversing with M. Massod, she interrupted him:

"Do you not think so, my dear?"

"Yes," replied the pastor, gravely shaking his austere head, "it is the gift of God!"

Mme. Massod suddenly started:

"There he is!" she exclaimed.

It was Trembloz crossing the square, trying to avoid the eyes of the onlookers and return to the parsonage, where his mother had gone before him. There was silence as he passed, all eyes followed him, but a kind of respect saved him from being troubled with congratulations. It was Dr. Mathorel who broke the ice with his customary exuberance:

"Permit me to shake hands with you, M. le Pasteur," he said, stopping him. "I am not at all pious—oh! anything but that!—but I love whatever is beautiful. And you have given us a beautiful sermon, a magnificent sermon—the like of which I have never heard in my life before!"

Others now approached in their turn with that desire of monopolizing the successful, which is one of the penalties of success. He bowed awkwardly right and left, embarrassed by these outstretched hands and the eulogies of these complimentary lips.

"You ought to go and speak to him, my dear," suggested Mme. Sordes to her husband.

The pastor, with a little hesitation nevertheless, directed his course towards Trembloz.

"Accept, my dear colleague," he said, "my sincerest compliments. Your first effort has been most successful, most successful, I assure you."

The words blistered his mouth, but he got them out notwithstanding, and they were only the more effective on that account, for in the memory of Biellian, never had M. Sordes made such an advance to a new pastor. Dr. Mathorel, who was observing him with a mocking eye, said in a low voice to M. Rabourin, "He has tamed the bear—eh! what a triumph!"

At this moment Mme. Massod leaned towards her husband.

"You ought to congratulate him also," she suggested.

"What is the good," answered M. Massod, gruffly; "he is receiving compliments enough. They will end by spoiling him."

She insisted.

"We ought to invite him to dinner."

"There's no hurry."

"Pray, go and say to him that he has done me much good!"

M. Massod de Bussens looked at his wife with astonishment, for it was, perhaps, the first time she expressed a decided wish, or did not give way at least to the first objection. Nevertheless, he obeyed, without

exactly knowing why, for he thought there was a little too much fuss being made about a young man who was hardly known to them; when he returned, it was with a certain amount of ill-humor that he said:

"He has promised to come on Friday."

She brightened up at once.

"Ah! that is right! Let us return home now."

The victoria started, receiving the salutations of those who still remained on the square around the pastor, and who seemed in no hurry to leave.

These congratulations, which he could not help receiving, caused Trembloz more annoyance than pleasure — like the heavy smoke of incense when inhaled too closely — the more so, as after the effort of his sermon he felt that crushing weariness, that physical exhaustion which always succeeds the hours of exaltation. He tried to profit by the attention the Massods attracted to withdraw. But M. Marquillier, who wanted to show off his critical attainments, stopped him, quoting a passage to which he took exception.

"Your meaning, then, was, M. le Pasteur — "

He had to listen, to try to answer, with tongue heavy and mind absent. This unseasonable discussion kept him some minutes further. As soon as it was finished he took leave of the little circle that surrounded him, awkwardly enough, and was at last able to proceed to the parsonage.

CHAPTER X

The Mother's Ambition

His mother was busy about the dinner while waiting for him. She ran to meet him with a joyous expression:

"Did not everything turn out finely! What a success you had to-day! a glorious success!"

He asked gently:

"You liked my sermon, mother?"

"I do not know—I did not listen to it. You understand, I hadn't the time; I was too busy looking at the people! They were all in raptures, dazed. How they did weep and blow their noses! they were fairly choked with emotion. I never saw the like of it! There was a lady near me—oh! quite a grand lady—who left in her carriage afterwards—"

"Mme. Massod de Bussens."

"Ah! Mme. Massod de Bussens was it? Well, her eyes fairly gloated on you, my boy!"

He suddenly saw again, as in a vision, the indistinct image of the young woman beside her carriage, who gazed at him while her husband was inviting him; and he blushed.

"All the same," continued Mme. Trembloz, "you

may well boast of making a conquest of these people who came to church with their scornful airs! Now they are yours; you can do with them what you wish —turn them round your little finger! Oh! I was sure you should succeed! I had no doubts about that; not I! And now they will worship you and flatter you and make a fuss about you, won't they! You take care only to steer your bark skilfully. For now you are the master, and you have but to be on the lookout for the heiress, my boy!"

Her eyes sparkled. She noticed, however, that he seemed very tired, and changed her tone:

"In the meantime, you must be dying of hunger. To speak so well must make a man feel empty after a time. You ought to take care of yourself. I shall have everything on the table in a jiffy; it will be ready immediately."

She returned to the kitchen, while Henri went into the dining-room on the first story, an apartment with hardly any furniture, and altogether too vast and gloomy. The dinner was laid on a gray oilcloth. He glanced at the two plates facing each other, and then sat by the window. He felt as if a great load was lifted off his shoulders, for this first sermon, on which the authority and efficacy of his ministry in great part depended, had caused him the liveliest anxiety. Now that the trial had finished to his advantage, he did not, however, experience a great joy; on the contrary, an indefinable melancholy was mingled with the feeling of his vic-

tory. His conscience, an easily troubled conscience, was already reproaching him with having thought more of the effect to be produced than of the cause he served. "The kingdom of God has no need of fine phrases," he was saying to himself; "truth ought to triumph by its own strength." He was angry with himself for yielding to those instincts of the artist, which his duty, as a modest servant, enjoined him to repress. "And then," he mused, "they will have a false idea of me; they will think I made promises which I cannot keep; they will be deceived in the end, unless I persevere in the evil course I have had the weakness to enter upon to-day."

"You do not look well pleased," said his mother, who brought in the dinner smoking hot. "You are tired. Come sit down and eat; that will do you good."

He did as she bade him. But as his eyes still continued to wander round with a vague expression of sadness, she grew impatient.

"Will you tell me, is anything really the matter with you?"

"Nothing, I assure you, mother," and he bent his head over his plate, sighing.

Then she began to overwhelm him with reproaches. Ever since he was a child he was the same, never satisfied; things succeeded with him better than with others, yet there he was! taking enjoyment out of nothing. What sacrifices they had made for him! Was he ever grateful for them? He had one sister at service, and a brother who labored at the plough, poor people like his

father and mother and their fathers and mothers before them. But he was a pastor, "in a grand position." What did he want then? And, returning to the idea that had been haunting her all the morning, she set about speaking to him of his future marriage with "the heiress," who would think herself only too honored to have such a husband.

"I hope you will then give up your long faces, and be contented at last!"

He let her go on without impatience, eating his boiled beef. What answer could he give? How could she comprehend his vague melancholy? Only when she stopped a moment, he tried to change the conversation:

"Decidedly, mother," he said, "we must hire a servant."

This renewed her vexation; her voice became menacing:

"Is it because my boiled beef does not please you?"

"No; but I have told you already I do not wish you to tire yourself waiting on me."

"We'll see; we'll see!"

And the repast was finished in silence.

The Sordes family came in in the afternoon after catechism, looking very solemn; then M. Quartier, his mouth full of congratulations; and, until late in the evening, there was a long file of visitors.

Early on Friday morning Mme. Trembloz was brushing and cleaning her son's best overcoat; an overcoat much too long, and with sleeves badly cut, but in a fairly

good condition still. She had hung it on the back of a chair to have a good look at it. She saw clearly that the seams were getting a bit shiny, and now regretted that her ill-timed parsimony had kept her from ordering a new one; for, in her eyes, this invitation to dine with the Massods de Bussens was a far more important event than the ceremony of the installation, or even than his first sermon. Henri was now making his first entry into society, into that real society of the wealthy and the noble, which, so far, she had only seen from the lowly level of her poor existence, with no feeling of envy either, quite resigned to be of no account, full of respect for the luxury that passed on its way above her. Never before had she experienced such a sense of pride; neither on the day when, the news reaching her that her son was about to leave the college at Lausanne with the honors of his class, she had put on her black gown and white bonnet and travelled third class to witness the distribution of prizes, and see him bending beneath a pile of big gilt books; nor yet on that of his consecration, which was, however, the great victory of all, the end of her struggles, the day on which old Trembloz, with his head cramped and almost lost in the collar of his finest shirt, saluted the dawn with these words: "At last!— We'll not lose any more by him, then!—"

Now another consecration was at hand: God had nothing to do with it, but Henri was about to scale several rungs in the social ladder at a single bound, to sit as an invited guest, an equal, among persons of high

distinction. He must, therefore, make a positively good impression, must show ease of manner, deportment, refinement; consequently, although she was somewhat at a loss as to the advice to be given in such circumstances, she decided to do her best in the matter of admonition and encouragement.

"I don't know much about such people," she said, turning round to him; "but I have more experience than you; pay attention, then; above all, be very careful of what you say — You must speak, of course; you're not invited simply for the purpose of listening to others. Mind you don't forget your position, therefore; show them you are a man of learning, far more than they are. But pay great attention to your words! Among that class of people one has to turn the tongue three times in the mouth before talking, as the saying is! You can never tell what meaning they'll take out of it! It's like going to one of your examinations. They will ask you a heap of things — about what you think and believe, and who are your parents, and what not. You mind! They needn't know everything, need they? Be careful particularly to say you're of no political party. You're only just come; you haven't had time to make up your mind. Besides, a minister ought not to be either a Radical or a Conservative."

Trembloz was listening, tying his necktie in the meantime.

"I believe you exaggerate, mother," he returned, smiling. "I had a letter of introduction to M. Massod

de Bussens; he invites me to dinner. The thing is quite simple and customary. It has not at all the importance you fancy."

She shook her rugged old head, in which ideas settled firmly, like greedy roots in a thin soil.

"You think so; oh, yes," she repeated; "you think so. But I know what I am saying. It isn't for nothing that people are asked to dinner."

He had put on the overcoat. She drew the lapels toward her and began rubbing out some rebellious stains. Then she moved slowly around him, making a careful examination.

"You'll need a new suit," she said. "I must see about it to-day. At present nothing more can be done. You are as well as you can be."

She looked at the clock. It was half-past ten, time still for a little more sound advice.

"It is slow, I fancy. When you pass by the Horloge, make sure of the hour, for you should not arrive either too early or too late. You are asked to come at noon; be there, then, at noon exactly."

She sat down facing him, and began to counsel him once more, raising her voice very high this time, on the questions that filled her mind since their coming to Bielle:

"Look here, Henri, you do not attach importance enough to the opinion of people. After all, you do not think enough of your future! You are twenty-eight years old, you have a fine position and are now settled

for good. You must now see about what you intend to do and take advantage of your circumstances. The great point for you at present is marriage; surely, you must have thought about it?"

Henri turned away his eyes; the face of a young girl came to his memory. "Ah! how happy he would have been with her, but—"

As he was beginning to let his mind dwell on certain memories, his mother persisted:

"It is quite time that you should think of getting married, isn't it?"

He murmured evasively: "Yes, of course; later on."

At once she raised her voice, according to a habit of hers of giving to all her remarks the tone of a scolding woman:

"Indeed! Later on? It will have to be soon, and the sooner the better. It is the only way in which you can settle down comfortably, I tell you! The only way, no matter how you look at it! Do you not see it? But look to it that you make a good choice and consider the matter from every side. There are a good many girls you must fight shy of. Of course, you understand you cannot marry a poor woman; that's out of the question. What would you live on? Your salary is well enough in its way for peasants like your father and mother,—but for a pastor! And then, there's sure to be a family. But all pastors marry rich women, lucky for them! Look at your colleague, M. Sordes, who is so set up. He was just as poor as you are when he was young,

while now, — oh! oh! And besides, the fortune is not everything. Oh, I know all about it, if I am a peasant; rank has to be taken into account. Now then, here on the spot you can find plenty of grand families with daughters to marry, plenty. And we must pick out one for you. Surely we'll find her! Then you will be quite the great man, like M. Sordes! Not that it will be at all so pleasant for your old mother. Of course, I'll stay with you as long as you are a bachelor, but after your marriage —"

He interrupted her:

"See here, mother, what is all this you are talking about?"

"Yes, yes; I know you are a good son. But, for all that, it is a nice figure I should cut with a daughter-in-law who wore silk dresses and played the piano. Oh, I know it well! So, I intend returning to the farm, where I'll get along as well as I can. You will come to see me sometimes. You will bring the children; as long as they are small they won't be ashamed of their grandmother. The little ones don't take notice."

She was growing tender while speaking; that is, as much as it was in her to grow tender. Her voice was softer and her eyes a little humid. He took her knotty old hand and squeezed it.

"Mother, I do not like your fancying such things. I shall never marry a woman who is unwilling to take me as I am, with all my duties —"

"You never can tell."

"Moreover, we have nothing to do with that at present. M. Massod de Bussens has no marriageable daughters."

"No, we have nothing to do with it now. We shall come to it, I hope, and must think beforehand. That is all I wanted to say. How far is it from here to the Tilleuls?"

"A good half hour."

"Well, start then; it is time. But, wait! Put an old handkerchief in your pocket to dust your shoes with. They will be quite white when you get there. Stay; take mine."

With this last recommendation she accompanied him across the yard, and then returned to her vague musings, in which so many contradictory sentiments managed to keep company.

"Decidedly," she thought; "he will never know what he wants!" She had so often seen and lamented her son's want of steadfast purpose, his irresolution. He was the sport of circumstances, going on his way without calculating, without a precise end in view. Did he not, the very moment after he chose his profession, the day after he took his bachelor's degree, actually want to study philosophy? His parents combated this astounding inclination. He yielded, without resistance, after a memorable discussion with the old father, who would listen to nothing, and cried, loud enough to wake the dead: "You will be either a minister or a peasant like myself!" And afterwards through what a period

of doubts and hesitation he had passed! Did he not, only a few months before his consecration, when his studies were just completed, take it into his head to abandon the sacred ministry, his faith, he said, not being firm enough? They had to argue with him and preach to him and drive him from post to pillar. "And what about all the money we lost on you?" growled the father. Now he was safely landed, it is true, but he thought of nothing but his sermons, his visits to the poor, the affairs of his parish. And there he was! He had to be constantly reminded of his interests, his future, of the fact, which he was quite as likely as not to forget, that there was a kind of mortgage on his person, on his very self: the capital amassed by the sweat of his forefathers. Did he not owe to their protracted toil, to the time passed in bartering their sabots and blouses for his pastoral bands, the chance of becoming a gentleman, a "monsieur,"—the first of his line,—and of founding a new stock, rich and prosperous and looked up to, soon to take rank among the first families of the country? Yes, all these ideas, which she hardly succeeded in reducing to form, jostled one another in the brain of the old peasant woman, though she only kept repeating: "He will never know how to steer his course! Luckily, I am here!"

CHAPTER XI

Mme. de Bussens

TREMBLOZ, however, was slowly following the road which he knew already. The snow had disappeared from the peaks of the Jura; the Dôle alone emerged all white in the clear sky from the sombre outlines. Springtime mists wrinkled the blue surface of the lake, which, in places, looked as if covered with plates of silver mail burnished by the sun. And the young man was musing also. But it was not the interests of the morrow that preoccupied him. His thoughts were leading him to the past, evoking long-forgotten shapes, pictures that had faded, or were seeking to renew, at this turn or that, vanished impressions which some detail of this landscape was calling to life; the turfy banks which ran along the highway, the beach, separated from the road by a curtain of acacias, where the small boy came to bathe. Then, his imagination took a leap over some years, wandered around the new faces that were encountered in these later days, and ended by fixing itself — why? — on the vision of Mme. Massod de Bussens, as she appeared under the veranda, holding her child by the hand, when she was calling back Nestor. This picture absorbed him so entirely

that he came to a halt almost mechanically in front of the gateway of the Tilleuls, rang without looking at the hour, and forgot to wipe his shoes, white with dust, as his mother had foreseen.

He had made a mistake as to the invitation. The dinner was to be at half-past twelve and he had arrived a full half hour beforehand. He had only to look at the embarrassed air of the servant with apron on, who was removing the last covers of the chairs of the drawing-room into which he was shown, to be conscious of his error. Trembloz sat down before the round table in the centre. He was opening a photograph album, when a little boy of about a dozen years entered, slim and tall, with a bright, watchful countenance, set off by a sailor's collar and his blonde curls. He was the first to speak:

"Good day, monsieur!"

"Good day, my little friend!"

They shook hands, all the while looking at each other. It was the child who broke silence the second time, asking in a clear voice in which there was not a particle of timidity:

"You are the new pastor, are you not?"

"Yes."

"Ah!"

He examined the visitor from head to foot, as one might look at a curiosity. His face expressed considerable surprise. It was evident that he did not think much of his appearance. He said, with a laugh:

"You preached a stunning sermon, though, didn't you? They did not take me to church last Sunday because I go only once a fortnight. It is quite enough, is it not? But papa and mamma go every Sunday. They were there, and when they came back last Sunday they spoke of nothing but you at table. And papa said: 'Oh! he is an orator, a great orator!' and papa isn't easy to please either. And mamma said: 'You did well to invite him. He must be lonely here if he is acquainted with nobody!' Is it true that you know nobody?"

Trembloz, very much embarrassed, did not know what to answer. He stammered: "I have been here only a short time" — and hastened to change the conversation, asking: "What is your name, my good boy?"

"Maurice."

"How old are you?"

"Twelve next autumn — the 5th of September."

"You go to college?"

"Surely, of course!"

"You work hard?"

"Hum! — Papa thinks they don't work us enough — Little he knows about it!"

The child shook his expressive head as if it was quite weighed down and tired with all the learning crammed into it.

"But I can never satisfy papa!" he continued — "And I take all the pains I can! — And there are things I cannot learn for the life of me; arithmetic is

one of them — Oh! arithmetic is just awful! And then the teachers are not always fair! The day before yesterday, Jean Quartier and Jules Mauseberg fell on me from behind, both of them together, and I only defended myself, and scratched Quartier's face for him, I can tell you! His cheek was all bloody. Well, if it was, I was defending myself, hadn't I the right? And M. Marquillier gave me an imposition, and papa said he did quite right, and he wouldn't believe it was they began it."

He talked with much animation, still quivering at the recollection of the battle and the injustice. At the close of the narrative his eyes filled with tears; he went on:

"But mamma backed me, oh! didn't she! Mamma is so good! She loves me! And I — Oh! —"

He clasped his hands in a fervent gesture. The door opened, and Mme. Massod de Bussens, in a pretty spring toilet, appeared on the threshold.

"You are welcome, monsieur." Trembloz apologized frankly for coming too early.

"The only misfortune is that Maurice must have bored you," she replied, playing with the boy's hair.

"Oh no! I assure you. Your little boy is charming. We have been talking like big people."

"Yes, I know he has talked too much. It is his great defect. He is an only son, which is the same as saying he is much with his mother — a great deal too much, perhaps. He fancies that every one likes to hear him chatter as I do. Come, Maurice, go and play out-

side awhile. You can return when the dinner bell rings."

After having been coaxed and petted a little the boy left. Then Mme. Massod de Bussens, sitting down, motioned Trembloz to an arm-chair. The unhappy pastor suddenly perceived the dust on his boots and became quite distressed. He tried to hide his feet. As he could not find anything to say, Mme. Massod, after a silence, asked: "Are you pleased with our little town, monsieur?"

"I have known it for some time, madame. I began my first studies here at the same college your son attends."

She seemed surprised.

"Ah! I did not know you belonged to Bielle —"

"I do not precisely belong to Bielle, madame. My parents lived in the country —"

He blushed, thinking that the word "campagne," which in French Switzerland signifies "villa," might give her a false notion as to his origin. He added hastily:

"My parents were simple peasants."

The frankness of this avowal, made on the spur of the moment, pleased Mme. Massod, who regarded him with sympathy.

"I used to come every day to the college," he continued.

Her eyes remained fixed on him with the same attentive, almost affectionate, expression, the gentleness

of which seemed to invite him to confide in her as a friend.

"Winter as well as summer. Our farm was far from the station — sometimes the roads were impracticable — so I can assure you my recollections of Bielle are not of the pleasantest character. Besides, my little schoolmates were not very fond of me; they used to torment me, and I could never tell why — "

"Children are sometimes so unjust, so cruel! Maurice complains much of them also — college life may be a rude apprenticeship!"

In this little sentence Mme. Massod succeeded in compressing all the good-will and kindheartedness of a person who knows, or guesses, the acute little sorrows, the torturing memories, the old bruises that may be hidden in a life apparently the most peaceful.

A little ashamed of complaining of the things of the past, Trembloz resumed:

"I stayed at Bielle only until I was fourteen. Since then I have had some very good friends, particularly at the University. And now — "

He paused, perceiving suddenly that "now" was, in his case, a strong note of interrogation — an unknown land of which he could tell nothing.

Mme. Massod continued for him:

"Now it is quite different! You are entering upon a noble career, one of those in which the most good can be accomplished. And you enter upon it possessed of abilities from the exercise of which you must realize the noblest satisfaction — "

He blushed and stammered:

"Oh, madame! —"

"Yes," she resumed, warmly, "you have a magnificent gift, monsieur; the gift of eloquence, one of the finest that man can have! I have not yet told you the profound impression your first sermon produced on me. I have not done so because I really cannot give you any idea of how strong and vivid it was! It was not merely the beauty of the form I admired; in all you said there was an accent of sincerity and faith, showing that behind it was a loyal and self-denying man animated by the one great desire of being useful —"

She stopped, while he murmured without looking at her:

"Useful — yes, madame. That is what I should like to be!"

After musing a little, he added:

"I often think of certain words uttered by a celebrated preacher, which I heard a long time ago, and can never forget; I should like to make them my motto. He said: 'If you wish to be useful, work with calmness, in silence, and in peace!' Preaching is but a single point in our career. There is something much more. Oh, something infinitely greater — the help we can bring, the succor we ought to bring to the weak, the influence exercised by one's ministry and by —"

He hesitated, fearing there might be a certain pride in what he was about to say:

"And by one's life," he concluded, as if driven by a

force stronger than himself to give his confidence even to the end.

Then he made the correction very hurriedly:

"Only it is very hard!"

Never could he have believed that he would have been able to disclose so many of his innermost thoughts to a stranger. It was because the slightest words she uttered, and her very silence even, found, with their irresistible sweetness, an entry into his soul.

"I do not believe you are one of those whom difficulties frighten," she answered with confidence. "You will always go forward; always. Besides, you have one precious aid in your career, you will feel that behind you there will be the sympathy of men of good-will, ready to sustain you; the sympathy of all who believe in goodness."

"I am aware there are many charitable persons here."

"We form a narrow little community, but what matter? We ought all to act within our circle, without troubling ourselves about its narrowness. The number of those who are helped is not a gauge of the value of the help, is it? You will find here a field quite vast enough for your good intentions, monsieur. And the good which you can do, which you are sure to do, will compensate for the evil days of your youth."

There was in her voice, in her attitude even, the composure of which showed self-restraint, a slight shade of exaltation. While listening, Trembloz was thinking of the discourses of his mother on his pastoral career,

and was making comparisons. It was the first time he heard in the soul of a woman the echo of his most familiar thoughts, and they took a more beautiful tone when reflected back on his own heart. He felt as if a spirit of great courage was springing up in him.

"Ah, madame!" he cried, with enthusiasm, "if others support me, if others understand me as you do, and if God aids me, I can do anything!"

This was the first time the name of God occurred in their conversation. Mme. Massod seized on the word:

"God always aids those who serve Him. You know it better than anybody, monsieur. You said it so well on last Sunday!"

He was about to reply, when Maurice re-entered like a whirlwind.

"Mamma, here is papa! Kiss me, quick! Another, quick!"

He embraced his mother passionately. The moment M. Massod de Bussens entered he started back, with a frightened and quick movement, as if he feared to be surprised in her arms. And, while the customary salutations were being exchanged, this child, hitherto so noisy and open-hearted, cowered in a corner, becoming suddenly so quiet that his pale little figure seemed almost an image, only with a little more color and expression than those decorating the apartment.

"We are still waiting for some of our friends, monsieur," explained M. Massod de Bussens; "they are

Americans, whom we see often. M. Leen is a very agreeable man, a true gentleman; his two children, a boy and a girl, like to play with Maurice. They live quite close to us, in the Bois-Joli, yon house, built in the style of a chalet, which you can see from the window, and which is called after the neighboring forest. Doubtless it is because they are such near neighbors that they are late."

The delay was not of long duration. M. Massod had hardly finished speaking when the door opened before the Leens. Trembloz at once recognized the riders he met on the day of his arrival: the father, tall, slender and handsome, with very pale features and yellow hair, as well as an unusual elegance in his gestures and attitudes, called up the idea of some northern god who had missed his way and was wandering among men; the two children, the one fourteen and the other twelve, were singularly frank and unrestrained, always ready to break out into a laugh. There certainly was nothing stiff or timid about these young people. It might be guessed from their somewhat blunt salutation to their elders and the fashion in which they ran immediately after to Maurice, who left his corner in some little fear and trembling, that these were children brought up in full liberty and already revealing a certain dogged strength of character. The entrance of these three individuals produced among the spectators the sudden impression of beings belonging to a different species, and not a little aston-

ished at finding themselves shut up within the narrow rectitude of Biellian habits, but surely astonishing still more the beings so unlike themselves, whose idiosyncrasies they for a time somewhat ruffled. After the presentation, Trembloz, relegated for the moment to the background, was able to observe the new arrivals, who for some minutes talked with their entertainers, as neighbors, about little domestic matters with which he could not be acquainted: an accident that occurred to their horse, troubles with their gardener, etc. Then, as M. Massod, seeing his isolation, turned towards him, he noted the familiar yet respectful ease with which M. Leen addressed the mistress of the house. She was listening to him with the same expression of intelligent sympathy that had impressed him a little while ago, her limpid blue eyes resting on his face, and a half smile of attention wandering over her lips. To see her thus, the same for another as for himself, troubled Henri to such a degree that he was beginning to feel embarrassed in replying to M. Massod. However, she drew near and took his arm when the servant came to announce that dinner was served. He wanted to say something to her, but could think of nothing; she was no longer the friend with whom he lately felt impelled to share his inmost thoughts, she was now but a stranger, from whom he felt ever so far removed. Great, indeed, was the difference between their relations now and those of an hour ago! He experienced a certain degree of deception, and said to himself that the sort of lan-

guage she had indulged in was but a vain display of the clever conventional verbiage common with women. "They look as if they entered into our lives and thoughts, and it is a mere sport for them." She interrupted his meditations doubtless with the object of putting him at his ease, for to reach the dining-room they had to follow a long corridor, and the silence was becoming embarrassing. She said in a low voice:

"Don't you think little Maud Leen very droll with her boyish airs? The cut of her gowns is her own invention; she tries to make them resemble the tunic of a collegian as much as possible. She will not hear of wearing her hair long, and her father thinks all this quite proper! He says there is a certain elegance in the style, recalling the comedies of Shakespeare. Do you not believe it singular?"

He could only assent:

"Singular enough, in truth."

"It is because M. Leen is somewhat of an original," she returned; "but very interesting, all the same; a superior man in his way; his way is occasionally rather alarming."

Still embarrassed, Trembloz could only take hold of the last word; he said in a tone of interrogation:

"Alarming?"

She explained quickly, for they had reached the end of the corridor:

"He believes in nothing. He has the most advanced ideas on everything. He makes remarks with the ut-

most coolness that raise the hair on your head. Of course, only when he gets warm. On other occasions he resembles the rest of the world. An excellent neighbor besides; agreeable, courteous and very good-natured. He will stay in Bielle only during the summer. He came last week."

CHAPTER XII

M. le Pasteur crosses Swords

AFTER entering the dining-room Henri found himself on the right hand of the lady of the house. "I shall have to talk," he thought; and his timidity was so much aggravated by the necessity he was under of taking some part in the conversation that he felt afraid to hear the sound of his own voice.

The effort to talk during the soup was rather laborious; then came one of those provincial vol-au-vents, the golden crusts of which hide an abundance of excellent things swimming in a plentiful sauce. Mme. Massod de Bussens lightly touched on two or three subjects, which found scarcely an echo. M. Leen was observing, like a man who searches for the source and aim of spoken words. Miss Maud broke silence from time to time, always ready with a laugh, a laugh that disclosed her fine, firm teeth; or Francis was heard whispering something into the ear of Maurice, who did not venture on a reply. During the next course there was a little more animation. Trembloz succeeded in uttering a few phrases, but, as the greatest attention was paid to his slightest word, it cost him a good deal of trouble to pronounce them.

Still, with the dishes that succeeded one another, and especially after an old Burgundy had taken the place of the thin Villeneuve wine which opened the repast, he felt his courage increase. Moreover, they stopped discussing the details of local life, of which he was as yet ignorant, as well as the gossip of the fashionable world, which escaped him entirely, and turned to general questions. M. Leen then abandoned his expectant and observing attitude, and entered quickly on the stage, with that peculiar appetite that some minds, devoted to metaphysics, have for dealing with great problems, when the stomach is satisfied, and so much the more so, as he discovered in Trembloz an unlooked-for sympathizer. For, in truth, however much the young pastor might be a stranger to the little nothings that furnished the food of society gossip, he was by instinct and feeling a serious debater. No sooner were topics of a deep nature discussed than he started at once out of the half reverie into which he had sunk, his ear on the watch, his mind strained, ready in retort, and, at last, combative, biting, lively and eloquent. Another man seemed to take the place of the poor, sorry creature in shabby clothes and with a mien the reverse of distinguished, who was frightened at the sound of his own voice a few moments ago; a man whose voice resounded, whose eyes flashed lightning, a man quivering with passion, and, therefore, the better able to hold the ground he had reserved for himself until now. At the dessert the Massods de Bussens gave up attempting to follow the conversation that

was growing more and more excited between their guests; it finally became a duel, where each displayed his diverse qualities. M. Leen kept on the defensive, and held his positions, always master of himself, with quick replies that struck home. Trembloz multiplied himself for the purpose of attack, lost moderation, perceived it, stopped for a moment, as if ashamed, but only to rush on anew, borne to the conflict by the very ardor with which it inspired him. It lasted until the mistress of the house rose, saying:

"Let us not forget the coffee, gentlemen, which is waiting for us in the drawing-room."

She took the arm of Henri a second time, to pass down the corridor. They did not speak; the customary commonplaces would have seemed to them out of tune with the great ideas that had just stirred them. But Trembloz, who had been blaming himself for making too strong a display of his convictions and defending his opinions with excessive violence, had now the sensation that, far from reproving his action, she was with him, on his side. It seemed to him as if she rested her hand on his arm with a trust in which there was something of joy, and as if the very depths of her soul must have vibrated with his during the stormy scene in which he was an actor.

However, taking a cigar from the box M. Massod offered him, M. Leen approached Trembloz, saying in an off-hand manner that precluded discussion:

"The truth is, monsieur, we occupy positions so totally different that an understanding between us is

impossible. You start from heaven, I from the earth. You suppose the Christian law established, while for me it is but the residuum of the prejudices of eighteen centuries. You give a precise meaning to words which in my eyes have none. We might be disputing for a hundred years without coming to any common ground of agreement. And yet, perhaps in the last analysis we are both right — the opinions which harmonize with your mode of thinking do not harmonize with mine, and reciprocally. That is the final conclusion to be deduced from all our arguments."

"Unless," said Trembloz, "there is an Absolute —"

"In which case," interrupted M. Leen, smilingly, "you would be absolutely right."

Then bringing the subject to an end, with the suppleness of one who likes to have the last word:

"Provided, of course, that the Absolute which may exist is the same as the Absolute which your consciousness reflects."

M. Massod, who no longer understood anything, came forward with cigars.

"Take a cigar, M. le Pasteur, I beg you; they are very good."

"Thanks, monsieur, I do not smoke."

When Trembloz sat down, he crossed his legs, according to his usual habit. He perceived his shoes with the dust on them still. He had forgotten all about them, and now the old uneasiness returned. He thought of

nothing but hiding his feet. Moreover, the interest of the conversation seemed exhausted; it fell back again into the trivial tone that marked the beginning of the dinner. M. Leen was quite at home in it, and took as much interest in the trifles that were now discussed as he had done in the lofty ideas that were agitated some time before.

Mme. Massod was almost the only one who talked to him, her husband being, as usual after a repast, dull and heavy. Trembloz now and then met her eyes, which rested on him for a moment, and he thought to himself: "Yes; she must think me awkward, timid, ill-bred."

About three, M. Leen gave the signal for departure. Taking the pastor's hand, Mme. Massod thanked him for coming, and added:

"Now that you know the road to the Tilleuls, monsieur, I hope to see you often."

He thanked her, bowed, and stammered something or other; but he noticed that she was more familiar and cordial with M. Leen, to whom she said; "Come soon!" as if it was the most natural thing in the world for them to see each other next day.

As Maud and Francis remained to play with Maurice, M. Leen left the same time as Trembloz.

"Will you allow me to go a few steps of the way with you, M. le Pasteur?" he asked.

Henri would have preferred to be alone, but he answered:

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"Certainly, monsieur; with pleasure."

Without further discourse they followed the road, at the top of which were outlined the esplanade, with its chestnut-trees, and the first houses of the town. The feelings experienced by Henri for his companion were of a rather complex character. This stranger, so handsome and cold, at once cordial and haughty, with the clear look of his pale eyes, the sympathetic sweetness of his voice and the Sphinx-like expression of the lips, on which you were never quite sure you saw a smile, inspired him with a sort of fear, increased still further by the frankness of his language. He was little accustomed to the companionship of persons of such freedom of thought, and, though he did not acknowledge it to himself, he was vexed at the familiarity with which Mme. Massod de Bussens had treated him, a familiarity that probably M. Leen was not particularly elated by. In spite of this, he felt that M. Leen was not an ordinary man. He experienced a singular attraction in his presence, in which curiosity was mingled with astonishment, sympathy with dread.

As they walked along in silence Trembloz remembered that, as a pastor, it was his duty on all occasions to proclaim his faith aloud. He, therefore, said in a somewhat magisterial tone:

"I cannot help grieving, monsieur, that the intelligence and ability you possess in such a marked degree should be placed at the service of theories so dangerous that —"

"Mme. Massod was about the only one who talked to him."

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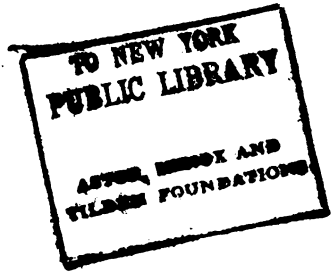
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M. Leen guessed without doubt what he was about to say, for there was a slight touch of arrogance in the retort with which he interrupted him.

"It would not be an easy thing to convert me, M. le Pasteur, for I am a very thoroughgoing unbeliever, and quite satisfied with my condition, I assure you."

Trembloz gravely shook his head.

"I can hardly believe it," he said. "I cannot form an idea in my own mind of what life can be without faith, that is to say, without certainty and without hope. It must be frightfully sad."

"A mere matter of education and habit, monsieur. Life as it is seems to me to be an excellent thing. We only do it a wrong by exaggerating its importance. As to my convictions, or, perhaps, I should rather say absence of convictions, they suit me so well that I have made my children sharers in them. They have never asked themselves if they have a soul; they hardly know what is meant by the word God. They are not a whit the less good on that account, and I hope they will be all the happier for it."

"What kind of happiness is that which is limited by the brevity of this life? How can we enjoy anything with the end which is on the watch for us? And then, what is happiness, after all? There is something greater — there is duty, there is a goodness."

M. Leen stopped at the middle point of the route.

"How far away we are from each other," he exclaimed. "We cannot exchange three phrases without

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finding ourselves in a trice at two opposite poles. If we were in a desert island we should not want subjects for discussion. But the road begins to be a little steep here. I must say *au revoir*, monsieur."

They shook hands. Trembloz climbed the last slope alone, at the top of which yawned the old gate, long since dismantled. For a moment he felt stirred with compassion for the self-satisfied incredulity of M. Leen; then his thoughts brought back before his eyes the image of Mme. Massod de Bussens.

"What is her opinion of me?" he asked himself.

As he was analyzing his recollections for the purpose of replying to the question, he recalled the dust on his shoes, felt a little ashamed, but smiled with confidence, murmuring:

"She must be above all that, surely!"

Then, pursuing his reflections:

"She made me promise to return; it shows I have not displeased her. I shall see her again then — soon — yes, soon —"

An ineffable feeling of joy and contentedness took possession of him; he compared his life at Bielle, such as she had appeared to picture it before him, with that of his melancholy childhood. This produced in him a desire to see the old college again, that gloomy building interwoven with so many memories. He went a little out of his way to pass in front of it. The walls were newly plastered, but dull, heavy and sad as of yore. He passed the deserted yard, then the building, then the

garden, planted with a few gaunt trees, their trunks scarred with initials, rendered uglier than ever by the gymnastic apparatus installed under them since his time. And he tried to see himself again as he was at that period, as he was at six years, at twelve. Impossible. He could no longer find a single one of his features, a single one of his thoughts, a single one of his emotions.

"How we change!" he murmured.

Shaking off his reverie, he entered a narrow lane. A man of round figure and jovial aspect stopped him.

"Good day; how goes it? Don't you remember me?"

Henri remembered him well. It was an old schoolmate, now a wine merchant, who spoke of their college friends with some emotion. He listened, answered, promised to pay him a visit. But when they separated he felt almost terrified at the thought that he did not experience the slightest pleasure in seeing him again.

"How different we are from each other!" he said to himself.

The words brought back to his memory the similar exclamation uttered by M. Leen a little while ago. And when he drew near the parsonage where his mother was waiting for him, he thought he was different from her also, just as much, or even more.

A slight shiver ran through him at the idea of such solitude among well-known and familiar faces, the oppression of which he felt all of a sudden.

CHAPTER XIII

Like an Open Book

DURING the evening, the next morning and the following day, Trembloz made a vain effort to think of something else besides Mme. Massod de Bussens. He feared to show any hurry in calling on her, but he hoped to meet her on the streets, which he tramped along every day with an uncertain step, under a thousand pretexts. He did not meet her. On the other hand, he encountered again and again the customary faces; the syndic Quartier, who nodded to him on the way with a gesture of triumph; M. Tiercet, whose thin profile might be seen gliding along the wall like a shadow; Pidoux, the apothecary, who proudly displayed his tuft between his colored bottles; Rabourin, the hatter, who stood in his shirt-sleeves on the threshold of his shop, grumbling: "He is oftener abroad than at home, this fine new pastor of ours!"

Many others, who followed him with curious looks, made him the subject, as soon as he passed, of mysterious questions and dubious replies:

"Where is he going?"

"Do you think he likes Bielle?"

"Has he taken a servant?"

"No, his mother is still doing the housework."

"A domineering woman, that!"

"Oh, a genuine peasant!"

"They say he is very fond of her —"

"And that she leads him by the nose."

"Is it true he dined yesterday at the Tilleuls?"

"Yes, with the Americans of the Bois-Joli."

"Ah, ha! He's getting on!"

Bielle, however, with its castle flanked by four turrets, its square old tower embroidered with ivy between the cracks, its pretty quay shut in by groves extending to both sides of the landing-place, its narrow streets mounting to the upper town, with its "tree of liberty" — a tall poplar rising in front of the castle and recalling memories of the Revolution — with its inhabitants also, some of whose figures, rather aged to-day, had remained engraved on his memory since the time he used to meet them in the same streets on his way to college, — Bielle seemed to Trembloz but the colorless accessory, the insignificant frame of the portrait that alone attracted his thoughts. The garrulity of some of the persons who stopped him in his course and insisted on walking a part of the way with him procured him the delight of hearing the name that was always in his thoughts spoken of, and getting the information he was longing for. One day M. Marquillier, who was a bit of a gossip and knew the history of every one for miles around in its slightest details, led him to the esplanade and spoke at great length of the Massods de Bussens.

"An old family, mixed up with the whole history of the Pays de Vaux. Their ancestors were bailiffs of the town in the time of the Bernese."

"Is Mme. Massod a native of Vaux also?"

"No, she is not."

And he gave a full account of her antecedents. She was born a Du Tertre, a Genevese family of high distinction. One of her ancestors was the pastor who defended Rousseau against the attacks of his fellow-countrymen. Both her parents were dead, and she was very rich — M. Marquillier underlined very rich by his tone of admiring veneration — she had been brought up, along with some cousins, by an old aunt, who was now dead, and had married, when quite young, M. Massod de Bussens.

No sooner did M. Marquillier utter the name of the husband than he seemed to expand:

"An excellent man, a good Christian, honest and enlightened, and very rich — very rich! — the man of all others the most highly respected by our town! The object of universal esteem!"

They had only one child, little Maurice, who gave them a good deal of anxiety:

"His mother, who is weak, has a tendency to spoil him. Luckily the father is at hand, and keeps a firm hold on him. As long as he is by, the urchin walks straight and respects him. But he respects nothing else. At the college, ah! monsieur, what a pupil!"

From others he learned other details. He was in-

formed, among various particulars, that Mme. Massod de Bussens did much good, visited the poor and gave her attention to many works of benevolence, especially to the asylum in which a score of orphans without means were reared. And he pondered on the goodness that emanated from her before his very eyes. He acquired also some information as to her disposition, her character.

"She speaks little," he was told by one.

He was astonished, for he had heard her say so much.

And it was added:

"She has the reputation of being very cold."

His astonishment increased, for never had he felt his soul glow with such a sweet warmth as when by her. "Were these people blind?" he asked himself. No; they were not blind; they had simply never seen her with the same eyes that he had, nor had she ever been to others what she had been to him. Ordinary eyes could not see her otherwise, and an indifferent observer would be inclined to say these blind individuals saw correctly enough.

Mme. Massod de Bussens was not precisely beautiful; but she had a wealth of thick silky hair, which set off a forehead of exceeding purity; large sky-blue eyes, from which flashed at moments a repressed inward light; a mouth of the most charming design, made for smiling, and which was seen to smile so seldom! Moreover, in spite of her thirty-four years, she remained young,

as slender as in the days of her girlhood, and as elegant and dainty in her habits also, never having given way to that careless disregard of person so frequently observed among women in the provinces, who grow careless of pleasing the world and become old before their time, having only to concern themselves about children who are sure to love them in any case and a husband for whom they have become merely a habit. She was rather taciturn, as Marquillier had remarked censoriously, although such was not the judgment of Trembloz. Was it at all surprising that the world regarded her as cold?

From her childhood she had accustomed herself to self-repression; she let not the world see what was passing within her, and at an early age was living an independent life, into which others could not penetrate. She had no friends. She froze such of her young companions as came to her with the sort of half-romantic, half-sensual friendliness that forms the basis of most of the early intimacies of women. As her cousins, who did not like her, treated her as an intruder, she had to assume a defensive attitude in their regard, which she adopted towards her aunt also after a time, and then it became natural to her. Was not the attitude she observed towards her husband pretty much the same? For between her and him there was no tenderness, no sympathy, no real intimacy. They respected, but did not know each other; they had a common life, in which the heart counted for nothing. Moreover, Antoinette did not care to make any deep inquiry into her sentiments; she had married

to get away from a house where she suffered, without love, but not without illusions, nor without hopes of affection which the appearance of M. Massod, ten years her senior, did not render entirely improbable. But, alas! her hopes, such as they were, were soon scattered. On the days following their nuptials she found in him a master, a mentor, a kind of peevish tutor, fault-finding and austere. She never dreamed, however, of making him any reproaches; impenetrable, tranquil and serene, she was a modest and devoted helpmate. Her husband would never have suspected she was unhappy, — if perchance he had ever conceived the idea of putting such a question to himself.

Till now but one single human being had understood her — her son. He was well aware of what the coldness veiled and what the silence meant. Between his mother and him there was knit an almost passionate affection, growing with his growth, and becoming every day stronger because their instincts forced them to make no display of it, to dread the knowledge of it coming to the eye of their common master, and to hide themselves from him so that they might indulge their love the more freely.

And now another being had read in her heart, had got a glimpse of the deep and innermost secret she kept so well.

This was what she told herself, with a kind of inward shudder which no muscle of her countenance betrayed, during the evening of the day when Trembloz dined with

her. As was her custom, after looking over the exercises of Maurice, she was examining her housekeeping accounts, while her husband read his journals. They never were in the habit of conversing, not having anything to say to each other, and never did she appreciate the silence that enveloped her in a soft, luxurious embrace better than to-day. But, for a wonder, it was interrupted. M. Massod de Bussens had finished reading, much earlier than usual, the Journal des Débats, the Gazette de Lausanne, the Journal de Genève and the Courrier de Bielle; whether that the news was of little interest or his mind was preoccupied with other things, he folded his four journals, scrutinized for a moment with his big round eyes the face of his wife, and asked:

"What do you think of the new pastor?"

She was expecting this question. She started, nevertheless, before answering in her usual voice:

"I think very well of him. Do you not also?"

M. Massod seemed to reflect, to weigh his impressions:

"Yes," he replied, shaking his head. "Yes, very well — very well. Yes — and yet — he wants something."

She answered mechanically, without raising her eyes from her work:

"What, pray?"

He did not reply for a moment, for M. Massod loved to envelop his slightest sayings with a silence that would give them solemnity.

"You must have seen it — good breeding. He is awkward, clumsy, timid. But what can you expect! A peasant! It is a pity; he comes from too low a class. Still, how can it be remedied? When a man is born among common people, something of it always clings to him. The distinctions that mark society mean a good deal. M. Trembloz is an evident proof of this fact. He has eloquence, talent and learning, but — he will never be one of us. And then, his name is Trembloz — Trembloz!"

He made a little grimace of disdain, which he emphasized by screwing his eyelids sharply, while Antoinette felt suddenly rising in her one of those revolts which she repressed so well.

"You are severe," she replied, in an indifferent tone.

He continued, complacently:

"Severe? No; very well disposed towards him, on the contrary. You wished me to invite him here at once. I have done so, at the risk of appearing a little too eager. But still, compare him with others, with M. Leen, for example, who is a gentleman. He is at his ease everywhere he finds himself — that is easily seen. You have only to look at him to conclude that he is a man of distinction."

She cast a rapid glance at him, which he did not remark.

"There are several ways of being distinguished," she said.

He repeated his grimace immediately.

"Oh, yes, of course; I know that," he said. "You do not understand what I mean. That M. Trembloz may be distinguished for talent, intelligence and, perhaps, for goodness of heart, I don't deny. But as for deportment — ah! deportment, he will never have it!"

Thereupon, M. Massod de Bussens began to yawn as if he was in danger of dislocating his jaws.

"I think I must have eaten too much at dinner," he said; "you gave us such a fine one. Or, perhaps, I talked too much. I do not feel at all myself."

"You will feel better after sleeping."

"Yes, I believe so. We had better retire."

He rose, but she took up a paper; she who never read one.

"What are you doing?" he asked.

"Don't disturb yourself about me."

And she remained by herself for a considerable time before an open journal, the letters of which danced before her eyes, happy to prolong the evening.

CHAPTER XIV

A Memorable Day

THREE or four days after, Mme. Massod de Bussens, on rising, as was her custom, at six o'clock, asked herself again:

"How is it I haven't been able to meet him in town? Not even once?"

Then she shook off the vague melancholy that was preying on her to attend to her duties as the mistress of the house. It was necessary to rouse Maurice, anything but willing to leave his bed; to have the breakfast ready — a gloomy repast, opened with morning prayer, at which the servants were present — then to see the lad set out for college, with his little oilcloth knapsack on his back, and to send him off with the usual cautions: "Don't be late! Go right on! You have only just time to get there!"

Vain words, for Maurice was fond of loitering. There were elders along the road, out of which whistles could be fashioned; imprudent butterflies, lizards warming themselves in the sun and quite fond of his music; and there was also the chance of falling in with a country cart coming from the direction in which he

ought to be going, and offering an opportunity of riding behind not to be missed, not to mention the day-dreams he indulged in when a bark passed close to the shore of the lake, or the singular idea that sometimes seized him to play with himself alone on the middle of the highway with his top or balls. The result was continual complaints of his son's misconduct to M. Massod, who scolded terribly. But, great as was Maurice's fear of his father, the temptations that assailed him on the way were too strong for it always. And so Antoinette never saw her son starting on his journey without heaviness of heart at the prevision of the almost fated fault on the road and the scolding on the return.

Once Maurice was done with, the real work of the day began, with its diverse little occupations at once distasteful and absorbing; parleying with the seamstress, overlooking the washing, discussions with the gardener or the cook; in short, a series of cares which consumed the hours, until the strokes of the big town clock, muffled by the distance, told that it was noon. On this day Mme. Massod felt as if she must make an effort to forget her usual little occupations. She hardly listened to the seamstress and took refuge in the garden, under the pretence of attending to the roses which the grubs were threatening. In reality she wanted to be alone, to do nothing, in order to experience the savor of a certain sense of well-being that had come to her, although her present contentment was of a somewhat faint and melancholy character; to lose herself in the dissolving sug-

gestions brought to her by the tepid breezes of this lovely spring morning. While thus engaged she did not perceive that the hours were flying, so that her husband, returning some minutes before noon, found her carelessly seated in a trellised arbor, embowered in honeysuckles. She started on seeing him, as if he had returned from a far-away country, or, perhaps, ashamed of having been caught in dreamland by this man who never dreamed. He believed her to be admiring the landscape — the only weakness he could understand — made a wide gesture that embraced the horizon from the Alps to the Jura, and said, in a tone more sententious than enthusiastic:

"It is always new, is it not? — so beautiful!"

"Yes," she replied, rising.

He was in an amiable humor; he took her arm, and began speaking of his agricultural improvements. Agriculture was a subject that never interested her; her husband expressed his serious disapproval of her indifference to his manures, steam engines and various projects of amelioration. As she was about to put a question to show that she was listening, she stopped, feeling it would be almost a lie, and looked round vaguely.

"You are not listening to me," said M. Massod de Bussens, with an impatient gesture. "What, then, can interest you? What are you thinking of, when you do think?"

She stammered, turning away her eyes:

"I was looking — to see if Maurice was coming."

The boy, in fact, was just making his appearance at the turn of the road which overlooked the arbor. They heard him whistling. He was about to start on a run, in fact had already started on it, when he noticed that his father was there. The whistling ceased on the spot; he dropped into a slow pace; his elation was quenched at once.

"You were not kept in to-day," said M. Massod. "Well, so much the better! One swallow does not make a summer, however."

As they were sitting down to table, Henri, the fool, his long, gray beard dishevelled by the speed with which he ran, brought a letter for Mme. Massod de Bussens. He muttered, twisting his hat in his hands:

"They're in a great hurry. You were to read it at once — at once."

It was a note from the directress of the asylum for young girls, Mme. Brun, who invited her to be present at an extraordinary meeting of the committee, summoned for four o'clock.

"Ho! ho!" said M. Massod, unfolding his napkin, "what is it all about now? Serious matters, eh?"

He smiled ironically, for he affected to have but a slight opinion of the "works" of his wife.

"I do not know," replied Antoinette.

He persisted, his curiosity on fire.

"Have you any suspicion?"

"None."

"You will go?"

"I really don't know —"

She saw immediately she was telling a falsehood; she knew very well she would go, for it was a usual thing for the two pastors to be present at these meetings, and while running over the note she was crying to herself with a thrill that ran through her whole being: "He will be there — I shall see him!" But after her answer she felt troubled, and hesitated. She was no longer sure.

"I feel a little tired to-day," she continued.

"What difference does that make?" retorted M. Massod de Bussens. "You must go positively. We must find out what it's all about."

His eyes shone, curiosity being his particular vice, his only one; but it is the vice of all small towns.

"You are right," said Antoinette, "we ought to know. I will go!"

And during the whole afternoon she felt as if she had taken an important decision, as if this session would be pregnant of consequence.

It was therefore with genuine emotion that she knocked at the great gray gate of the asylum some minutes after four. The asylum for young girls was her favorite work. She had often had doubts and deceptions in her love of goodness, believing, as she did, that charity ought to be a virtue, rather than an exercise. Her husband's heap of stones, which furnished mendicants with a wearisome and sterile semblance of labor, disturbed her as a symbol of unjust tyranny; a

secret instinct of revolt made its voice heard within her whenever she saw some unfortunate woman wheeling the useless barrow under the eye of the master of the house, who then seemed to her a jailer or the warden of galley slaves. Her upright mind criticised the works, to which, however, she was devoted, in the same spirit; this charity without love left her heart empty, being, perhaps, she thought sometimes, only a mean calculation, a kind of premium paid with grumbling by the rich to insure themselves against the revolt of the poor.

But here, no doubt was possible; a real service was rendered to those unhappy creatures left without support or resources before being armed for life, condemned to misery or to shame; a species of family was created for their special behoof, which reared them, gave them a little affection and a modest education suitable to the modest destiny they could only expect, placed them in service when they had reached their eighteenth year; nor did its solicitude abandon them afterwards, but followed them a long time still, with friendly eyes, provided, of course, they continued worthy of it. During the ten years that Mme. Massod de Bussens had devoted her attention to this asylum she had taken a special interest in some of these poor girls. One of her dearest joys was to receive favorable reports of them later on, to know that they were well placed or married, — happy mothers, perhaps. The interests of the establishment touched her very closely then; she never missed one of the meetings in which they were

discussed under the time-honored presidency of M. Sordes.

She crossed the courtyard rapidly, where some of her protégés in gray gowns and white caps were passing, and at the same time whispering to one another with airs of great mystery.

She mounted to the first story, where was the place of meeting. She at once noticed Trembloz, whose eyes were watching for her. Although she was sure of seeing him beforehand, she did not the less experience a violent emotion, which she repressed with her habitual self-control. A second glance showed her that the assembly was complete. Around the two pastors were Mme. Sordes, attentive and ready to afford her husband the aid of her unvarying docility; Mme. Quartier, "Mme. la Syndique," as thin and dried-up as the syndic was stout and well-conditioned, with a figure like the blade of a knife, and a bilious complexion, her long hands stretched out before her like unto some overgrown spider anticipating its prey; Mme. Tiercet, the only one dressed for the occasion, in flower-wreathed hat and light gloves, drumming her fingers on the table with a somewhat volatile air; Mlle. Surgeat, poorly garbed, her knotty hands encased in cotton-silk gloves, evidently very anxious as to what was about to occur, and Mme. Brun, the directress of the asylum, a smart, round little body, who prided herself on her talent for speaking with the utmost fluency on things the most indifferent.

After the usual compliments, which always lasted some minutes, for it was necessary to become acquainted with the health of all the various families — and Mlle. Surgeat took delight in recounting her rheumatisms — M. Sordes opened the session, read the report, presented his new colleague, who would henceforth fulfil the functions of secretary. Then he called on Mme. Brun, who began:

"If I have taken the liberty, ladies and gentlemen, of convoking an extraordinary session, it was because it was absolutely necessary. You know that my rules authorize, and, in certain cases, make it my duty to do so. You will recognize, without doubt, that we are in the presence of one of those cases, when you have learned the circumstances which have rendered this convocation indispensable—"

She paused, coughed and resumed:

"Since our establishment has existed, and since I have had the honor to direct it, we have never found ourselves face to face with a difficulty comparable to that which unites us to-day. There is nothing less at stake than the fair fame of our dear asylum, threatened by the misconduct — the shameful misconduct — of one of our pupils!"

Antoinette was in agony. She was thinking of her favorites, and one of them might be in question. But Mme. Brun continued, growing more and more embarrassed as she drew near the fact:

"The thing is so frightful that I truly do not know

in what terms to relate it to you. It will be as painful for you as for myself. It is a trial, a real trial, for us all. In fine, I thought I remarked some time ago — that one of our pupils — one of those we loved best — one of those on whom we reckoned most to reward our efforts — Rose — Rose Charmot — "

CHAPTER XV

Poor Rose!

STRUCK to the heart, Mme. Massod de Bussens could not help crying out:

"Rose!"

For she was fonder of this sweet, graceful child than of all the others, a girl too pretty for her humble state.

"Yes, Rose," repeated Mme. Brun, "it is to speak of her that we are met. You are about to see, ladies, how she has responded to our solicitude, how unworthy she has been of our sympathy. I thought I remarked, some time ago — nay, I had even verified a certain number of little falsehoods tending to excuse her prolonged absences when she left the establishment, or sometimes with the object of procuring leave of absence under different pretexts. You know, ladies, how scrupulous I am about such things, and how careful I am before I give a pupil permission to absent herself. But Rose was one of those in whom we had most confidence. This was the reason why it was some time before I mistrusted her. Alas! could I foresee that this child, so well conducted, so obedient and quiet, had a perverse and vicious soul? Who among you, ladies, would have suspected it? And if I

have yielded to illusions that diminished my vigilance, who is there among you that did not share them ?"

Mme. Brun glided thus gently into a personal apology, for she was afraid at bottom that she might be made responsible for the fault she was about to reveal. A murmur of approval reassured her. However, her voice began to tremble and her eyes to grow dim when she resumed:

"At the point where we are, I cannot give you, as I should like, all the details of this disgraceful conduct. I do not know them myself. Rose, whom I have locked in her room, refuses to answer my questions. Nevertheless, she does not deny anything. Even if she wished to deny it, she could not any longer — for her expiation has begun already."

They no longer breathed. With impatient eyes riveted on Mme. Brun, they seemed crying to her, "Have done! tell us the end!" The directress still hesitated, oppressed, as if the words refused to leave her throat. At last, in a very low voice, she murmured:

"Ladies — ladies — the unhappy creature is *enceinte !*"

A murmur of stupefaction traversed the assembly; indignant exclamations, severe or confused glances were interchanged, then fastened on Mme. Brun, who, frightened at the effect she produced, beat a retreat, stammering:

"I am going for her. You will question her yourselves."

She passed out. No one dared speak. All eyes were fastened inquiringly on the austere countenance of M. Sordes, who looked more impenetrable than ever.

Mme. Tiercet murmured:

"What horror!"

"Poor Rose!" replied Mme. Massod de Bussens. Mlle. Surgeat was blushing; two tears which she kept back shone in her good old eyes; Mme. Massod's cry of pity made them run over.

"It is so sad!" she sighed.

In spite of the respect the old maid inspired, her remark met with glances of astonishment and reproval; so that she timidly bent her head when Mme. Quartier, carried away by her indignation, exclaimed:

"More to be blamed than pitied!"

At the same time the syndic's wife leaned over to her neighbor, Mme. Sordes, and, no longer capable of containing the thought that engrossed her soul, whispered:

"Who is her accomplice?"

Mme. Sordes made a gesture of ignorance.

"We shall learn," she replied. "Certainly we shall learn."

And she still further compressed her thin lips. Mme. Tiercet, who had uttered but one exclamation, ventured the remark, shaking her flower-adorned hat:

"Perhaps our dear friend, Mme. Brun, may, after all, not have been sufficiently — or she may have been too —"

But M. Sordes defended the absent one:

"Mme. Brun is above all reproach!" he declared in a peremptory tone. "We ought not to render good people responsible for the faults of the bad!"

Mme. Tiercet let her nose drop like a schoolgirl scolded, and nobody again breathed a word until the door opened to give passage to Rose, whom Mme. Brun was pushing before her.

She was a ravishing young girl, hardly seventeen, with small features, of an exquisite delicacy, yellowish flaxen hair and flaxen blue eyes, in which shone innocence and candor. She was like a fine piece of porcelain, fragile and white, losing none of her elegance in the gray robe of the asylum; she was like the princess of the fairy tale dressed as a servant by some wicked conjurer. With the instinctive movement of a threatened child, she tried to cling to the skirts of Mme. Brun; then, when the latter repulsed her, she turned aside, her face in her hands, half bent forward, shaken with great sobs.

"Here is the culprit!" said the directress. "I have been able to elicit nothing from her — nothing. You may question her as seems good to you, ladies. Perhaps she may be more docile with her protectors."

The judges interrogated one another's eyes. What questions ought they to put? With what ought they to begin the inquest?

After a few seconds' hesitation, Mme. Quartier recurred to her idea, turning round to M. Sordes.

"Don't you think we ought, before everything else, to learn the name of her companion?"

Mme. Tiercet approved by a movement of the head. Then M. Sordes began:

"Come now, you unfortunate girl. You have nothing to hide from your protectors, who are acquainted with your misfortune. Tell us who is your — accomplice?"

Rose replied only with a fresh flood of tears.

"You weep," continued M. Sordes with emphasis; "you deplore your misconduct — it is too late! The time to think of the consequences of sin is before sinning. You must understand that if anything can inspire us with the least indulgence in your favor it will be perfect frankness on your part, a complete confession and entire openness with us."

"Yes," assented Mme. Quartier, "we want to know everything; it is our right!"

"And our duty!" added Mme. Tiercet, clinchingly.

Rose continued to weep.

"Consider, my child," said Mlle. Surgeat, kindly, "that we might still be able to save you. We will try to influence the person who wronged you, and prevail on him to marry you. He has promised, no doubt, to do so, hasn't he? Come now, hasn't he promised to marry you?"

The tenderness of the words and of the tone acted on the young girl, who removed her hands from her face and gazed beseechingly at the old lady. But Mme.

Quartier, who found it very hard to keep down her impatience, broke out again:

"Look here, wretched creature that you are! answer! Answer, I say! Or if you won't answer it will be worse for you!"

But the child again hid her countenance, bathed in tears.

"Rose, let me entreat!" said Mme. Brun in a conciliatory tone.

While Mme. Sordes, rolling her little eyes and ungluing her lips, exclaimed:

"You see, she will not speak!"

"Is it necessary to recall what we have done for you?" said M. Sordes. "We have picked you up out of the gutter. We have reared you. Is it thus you reward us for all our care, all our devotion?"

Then Rose, between her sobs, in a poor little shrill voice, like the tones of a cracked crystal, replied:

"I do not want — to tell — his name."

The declaration was received with murmurs.

"Oh! oh!" cried Mme. Tiercet, opening her eyes at their widest, as if she saw on a sudden horizons drowned in mystery starting up before her.

And Mme. Quartier hotly:

"Is it, perhaps, because he cannot marry you? But in that case —"

"Oh! it is even more serious, perhaps, than we thought!" groaned Mme. Sordes.

But Mme. Quartier forgot herself so far as to strike

the table with her clenched hand, almost screaming: "Speak, girl! Speak, I say!"

Again the little trembling voice stammered:

"I am guilty, and no one else. I don't want any one — to get in trouble — on my account."

M. Sordes in turn raised his voice:

"You don't want? Ah! you don't want! Well, then, I order you to speak — yes, I, who am your pastor; I who instructed you; I, who have received you at the Holy Table — I order you, do you hear?"

Rose uncovered her face, which, under the tears, preserved its transparent freshness like a flower under the dew. She stopped weeping. Her candid eyes rested softly on M. Sordes, and in a voice that grew firm with a resolute gentleness, she declared:

"I will tell nothing — nothing. I do not want to say anything!"

And, quite pale, she faced her judges.

The commotion that ensued was awful. Mme. Quartier drew herself up to the full height of her tall figure and hissed between her cruel lips:

"She braves us!"

Mme. Sordes repeated:

"Ah! the miserable child; the miserable child!"

Mme. Tiercet veiled her face with her light gloves. M. Sordes's countenance was already assuming a terrible severity, which portended anathema, when Mlle. Surgeat, trembling with emotion, cried, in a supplicating voice:

"Do not torment her any further!"

So great was the respect inspired by her fine fortune, which the charitable institutions of the town had already strong hopes of inheriting, that M. Sordes checked his anger:

"Take her away, madame!" he ordered Mme. Brun. "It is useless to prolong this painful scene. Our good words can do nothing with such a hard heart! Nevertheless, it is well for her to know that, since she confesses nothing, we are bound to exercise the greater severity towards her."

Mme. Brun passed out with Rose. Conversations were held in a low voice, interrupted by a few exclamations, which summed up the general impression:

"What incredible stubbornness!"

"It must be the spirit of the devil that is in her!"

"Who could have foreseen such perversity!"

But there was no more discussion. The thoughts of each were ripening for action. Mlle. Surgeat, with bent head, was nursing her sorrow; the eyes of Mme. Quartier were ominous of a threatening future; Mme. Sordes herself assumed a dangerous look, the fruit of a successful effort at severity; the poor woman resembled a soldier who is hurried into battle by the voice of his leader and the example of his comrades. Naturally kindly and rather indulgent, she could become aggressive, sour and harsh, in order to follow her husband.

When the directress returned, the discussion began anew.

"We should not bestow all our thoughts on this

wretched creature," declared M. Sordes, "but on her companions; those companions whom a bad example may corrupt; those young souls whose guardians we are and for whom we are responsible. For their salvation we must make an example."

He looked at Mlle. Surgeat as if to keep her in order.

"We have only one thing to do; only one," he continued; "to separate the tares from the good grain; to expel her from the asylum immediately, in order that her presence may no longer pollute our house, and that the contagion of her vileness may not spread among our other sheep."

"Yes, yes," assented Mme. Quartier. "No pity for her, since she won't tell us anything!"

Under the eyes of M. Sordes, Mlle. Surgeat no longer stirred; she had so often, in the course of her long life, taken the side of the weak and guilty, in her heart, against their inflexible judges! but her compassion was barren of results, as is the case with so many good sentiments, either repressed or ineffectual. Energy was indispensable, and, alas! the poor lady had none! And so she bowed her doleful head, resigned to everything, a tear of impotent pity trembling on her eyelashes.

"But, if we expel her," said Mme. Massod de Bussens, who had not yet made her voice heard, "where will she go to? What will become of her?"

"Well, what does it matter?" cried Mme. Quartier; "that is no longer any concern of ours!"

"She is lost," said M. Sordes; "lost without remedy! She has an uncle somewhere, I believe. He may receive her, if he wishes. As for us, our first duty is to preserve our institution and save its good fame. It is necessary to strike without weakness! Let us show our pupils into what an abyss sin leads! Is such not your opinion, my dear colleague?"

He turned to Trembloz, who, with a sad air, was following the discussion, in which he had not taken any part, and who murmured:

"Christ pardoned the woman taken in adultery. A little indulgence sometimes —"

M. Sordes interrupted him impetuously: "A little indulgence. What do you mean by that, pray? What do you wish us to do for her? Come, come, my dear colleague, explain yourself! You know that the Lord has said, 'If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee; for it is better for thee that one of thy members perish rather than that thy whole body should be cast into hell-fire.'"

However eloquent he might be in the pulpit, Trembloz felt in the midst of these strange figures a timidity that paralyzed him. He would have wished to defend the poor child he had just caught a glimpse of, and he did not find the words he sought, or did not dare to say them. A look which Mme. Massod de Bussens fixed on him emboldened him a little.

"Still I think," he returned, "that we cannot send her away in this fashion, without taking some thought

of what is going to become of her, a poor girl, so young, utterly helpless, abandoned to herself. I assure you, it is frightful."

Antoinette's eyes gave him gentle encouragement. He continued:

"No doubt we ought not to allow evil to enter this house. But if we are responsible for other young girls confided to our charge, are we less so for this one? Perhaps we might still help her. There is mercy in heaven for all faults —"

Mlle. Surgeat raised her head. M. Sordes, restless, stopped Trembloz with a gesture.

"You are young, my dear colleague," he said. "You do not yet know the human heart, nor what abysses of corruption it conceals. You believe that something may be done by indulgence and kindness. An error! a dangerous error! It is only by fear alone that men are induced to adopt the straight and narrow way. Indulgence is in most cases a culpable weakness. The better we treat the wicked, the more hardened they become in iniquity. You will know it soon by sad experience."

"It is utterly impossible that this child can have become hardened in iniquity," replied Trembloz. "She is sixteen, or hardly seventeen, years old. She repents —"

"Oh!" interrupted Mme. Quartier, "if she repented sincerely, she would have told us everything!"

"But does not her very silence," rejoined Trembloz,

"spring from a sentiment — relatively good? She feels that she is a fallen creature; she does not wish to drag another with her in her fall. There is a certain courage and generosity in this."

This time M. Sordes assumed his austerest manner.

"Courage and generosity!" he exclaimed. "My dear colleague, do you really think so? Can there be courage and generosity in evil? It is a hardening of the heart, believe me! Your youth is hurrying you on to perilous illusions. What would have become of this asylum if we had conducted it according to your principles? Until now it is our principles that have prevailed, and the house has not got along the worse on that account. I hope the same principles shall guide it ever, and that you may soon come to recognize yourself that they are the only legitimate ones."

Thereupon M. Sordes ran his eyes through the assembly.

"Does any one else want to speak?" he asked in a dry tone.

Nobody budged.

"Since no one has anything further to say," he resumed, "I am going to put to the vote the proposal for immediate expulsion. I beg all who are in its favor to raise their hands."

Mesdames Sordes, Quartier and Tiercet raised their hands eagerly; Mme. Brun followed after a brief hesitation; the part she had to play was that of being always on the side of the majority.

"Are there any who are opposed to it?" asked M. Sordes.

The dissidents made no sign. He concluded: "The vote is for immediate expulsion. Mme. Brun, you will be kind enough to see that this painful resolution is carried out, will you not?"

The directress made a sign of assent. Then, as Mme. Massod de Bussens in turn called to her, she stepped towards her.

"Mme. Brun," said Antoinette, in a firm voice, which concealed her deep emotion, "you will tell Rose that I am taking her with me — to my home. She can come at once. I shall bring her in my carriage."

These words were received in icy silence. Without looking at any one, M. Sordes murmured: "Such is the fruit of a few weak words and of pity out of place."

But Mlle. Surgeat approached Mme. Massod and whispered:

"If I can be of any help to you in your good work, it will make me happy to do what I am able, believe me!"

Trembloz had turned aside to hide his emotion. He was saying to himself within his heart:

"She is good! Oh, how good she is!"

And as he felt like kneeling down before her, he no longer ventured to look at her.

CHAPTER XVI

A Plea for the Fallen

MME. MASSOD DE BUSSENS had obeyed a sudden impulse of the heart without any thought as to possible consequences. Reflection came to her when she saw the unfortunate girl's little valise in the hands of her coachman Jean, who looked as if his feelings were too much for him, as he received it from a servant, and especially when she had poor Rose beside her, cowering in a corner of the carriage, endeavoring to make herself as small as possible and keeping back the tears.

"Home!" ordered Antoinette, after saluting Mme. Brun.

During the jolting of the old landau, questions were shaping themselves in her mind. This one above all: "What will my husband say?" She had no doubt he would disapprove; for, though generous after his fashion towards recognized works of charity, he was incapable of comprehending acts of pure pity, unconscious and spontaneous, like that she was engaged in. But at what point would his disapproval stop? He was naturally tyrannical, jealous of an authority which he asserted even in the minutest details of household management.

What reception would he give to this lamentable stranger who was about to take up her residence under his roof? What if he were to send her away without listening to a word?

At this thought Mme. Massod cast a glance at her companion, still holding back her tears and her sobs, and made an effort to keep up her courage in order to keep up her own.

"You are afraid, my child," she said, pressing her hand.

Rose's answer was a look and a feeble "Yes, madame."

She continued bravely:

"Fear nothing — you are with me. I will not desert you."

"Thanks, madame; you are good!"

Was she good, really? In any case, she had just been so, and her action was likely to expose her to considerable inconvenience also. But as she was congratulating herself a little complacently on the fact, new questions disturbed her. Supposing M. Massod de Bussens received Rose, what in the world were they to do with her? How were they to treat her? Could they allow her in her present condition to mingle with the servants? And would the latter, who were quite as righteous and severe as their master, consent to hide their contempt? What would Maurice think, whose imagination was only too well disposed to wander into forbidden grounds? Thinking of all these things, she

had a shudder, almost a regret. But, just as if she guessed her thoughts, Rose pressed her hand. There was a return of that compassion which the embarrassments so clearly foreseen in the future were threatening to crush.

"Poor little one!" she murmured, returning the timid caress.

Replying to her own fears, she continued mentally:

"If we had to think of everything, we could never do good."

The carriage passed between the church and the parsonage, resting tranquilly behind its green and white gateway. This idea passed for a moment through the mind of Mme. Massod de Bussens:

"He approves what I have done; yes, certainly —"

She felt proud of the approbation. Then came a doubt:

"Still, why did he not look at me?"

She repelled it.

"No matter! He approves; I am sure of it! He is right, and his opinion is of more account than that of all the others."

They passed under the arch of the ancient gate. As the horses drew near the dwelling-house at a slow trot, Antoinette's emotion continued to increase. But Rose's convulsive gasps were growing more alarming every moment, and she tried to relieve her own fears by thinking of the anguish of this child, forced to find shelter under the roof of strangers, and coming amongst

them with terror and shame as her companions. Rose had the appearance of quite a little girl, and, for the first time, Mme. Massod began to think of her fall. How could it have been possible? What man could have had the sad courage to destroy her? Or, perhaps she may have loved? Loved! This word, the meaning of which she hardly knew, this word which awoke neither memory nor hope, now, in crossing her imagination, opened suddenly a half glimpse of an immense horizon; she started as if at the approach of a mystery. But the carriage was already stopping before the gateway. Jean gave notice for somebody to open by cracking his whip. Rose cast a look at her protectress, who pressed her to her side, and, with an impassioned movement, repeated:

"Do not be afraid. Fear nothing."

M. Massod de Bussens was in the yard, engaged in watching a vagabond carting away his heap of stones. He gave a look at the carriage; his eyes opened wide with amazement, when he saw Rose get out and Jean handing the little valise to the chamber-maid:

"What's the matter?" he asked, approaching.

"Nothing," replied Antoinette. "I will explain."

Then, addressing the chamber-maid, who was waiting:

"This young girl will stay here a few days. Show her into the little blue room."

The little blue room was the one usually reserved for the servants of friends on a visit.

Rose, who could hardly stand, disappeared behind the

maid, her legs bending under her, as she cast a last look of entreaty upon her mistress.

"Now," said M. Massod, "I hope you are going to explain."

"Yes; come!"

She led him into the drawing-room. She was at all times in dread of him, as of a severe master, but never so much as now. Still, she did not wish him to perceive her terror; and it was in a calm and firm voice that she told him Rose's history.

M. Massod's face darkened as he listened. When she had finished he did not answer at once; he reflected a moment with a dissatisfied expression, and spoke as if he was weighing his words:

"We cannot send her away, since you have brought her here; it would look as if I was finding fault with you. Evidently we cannot. No use crying after spilt milk."

She gave a sigh of relief, astonished that the thing should pass off so simply.

"But what you have done is awfully absurd," he continued.

He began walking up and down, and gradually became more and more angry.

"Absurd! absurd! What will they say in the town? Besides, what business was it of yours? You should have respected the decision of the committee! One doesn't become a member of a committee to run counter to its decisions afterwards! These ladies will blame you,

you may be sure of it! If you wished to do something for this unfortunate privately, I could have understood you. For we can't let people die of hunger, even if they are guilty. And, still, that would perhaps be the best thing to do. I have no sympathy with this compassion for faults that do not admit of excuse. This pity for girls who take to ill courses while still under age is absurd — as if whatever evil happened to them was not a just retribution. Absurd, I repeat. They are simply harlots, and that is all."

"She is so young!" stammered Antoinette.

"The more reason for passing her by with contempt! What did the other members of the committee say — M. Sordes?"

"Oh! M. Sordes! He was the most cruel of all."

"Naturally, they may say what they like of him, he is a man of good sense; he has shown it again. And M. Trembloz?"

She had an instinctive feeling to take refuge behind his authority:

"Oh, as for him —" she said eagerly.

She paused. The idea occurred to her suddenly that her husband might hold his conduct in disfavor.

"As for him," she resumed, with an accent of indifference, "I am rather inclined to think that he was in favor of indulgence."

She thought to herself: "I lie," blushed, and her next words, spoken hastily, were an aggravation of the falsehood.

"But he did not pronounce very plainly for one side or the other. You know, he has been here only a few days."

Immediately she regretted the evasion, for if her husband, as was probable, heard of the attitude of the young pastor from others in the town, what must he think?

"Hum!" grumbled M. Massod de Bussens, "another of those dangerous, unbalanced spirits. No need to be long in a town to be aware that you should always stand up for correct principles. Ah! we are living in a nice world; juries acquit assassins, and honest women pick up young wantons! Good God! where are we going to!"

He had not yet examined the practical side of the affair; he suddenly perceived it, and his anger was rekindled:

"What are we going to do with this creature?" he cried. "To bring her here as a friend? Let her mix with the other servants? A fine example for them, truly! And Maurice? I wager you have not even thought of him! Since she is enceinte, she will be confined, I suppose, eh? And where? In our house? Ah, no! Not if I know myself! It is too much; too much, indeed! But there; you thought of nothing, nothing but the present moment and the pleasure of playing the generous-hearted woman. You have been as heedless and harebrained as you could desire! Well, get out of it now as you can! You have brought us all to this pass, it is for you alone to see a way through. She may remain here a few days, for we cannot get rid

of her immediately. But after that let her go elsewhere, — to the devil, if she likes, for all I care!"

Thereupon he went out, slamming the door violently after him.

Antoinette did not care now to think of the misunderstandings that separated her from her husband; this time her joy was so great at seeing that for the present he had no intention of bringing matters to a crisis with her protégée that she never dreamed of being angry with him, and she went up to the little blue room to pity and console Rose.

CHAPTER XVII

"She loves your Son!"

"WHAT will they say?"

This cry of M. Massod de Bussens is the first question any incident which trenches on the commonplace current of things arouses in a little town; and as it is justified by the manners peculiar to those strait-laced localities, where a few hundred idlers, deprived of the engrossing occupations of great cities, are reduced to the necessity of spying on one another in order to fill up their time, consequently the news of Antoinette's generous action, spread abroad with startling rapidity, furnished the theme of endless comment. Even on that very evening, Bielle spoke of nothing else. There was a gentle warmth in the air, unusual for the season; it was one of those fine evenings of May, that seem to invite gossip and protract it indefinitely. The shopkeepers had brought out chairs or benches in front of their stores, on the side walks of the main street; gathered in little groups, they discoursed together by the light of the moon and the lamps, while well-known figures passed by, those they saw every evening, always the same, at the same hours. So they were certain of

meeting M. and Mme. Tiercet, at a quarter to eight, about to take their usual constitutional on the esplanade, and half an hour later they were able to say, on perceiving M. Quartier's bulky form moving in the shade:

"That's the syndic going to have his nip at the Croix Fedérale."

This evening, instead of passing on directly after returning the salutations of his townsmen, he stopped in front of the shop of his enemy, Rabourin, who was talking with his neighbor Mauseberg, Dr. Mathorel and M. Marquillier.

He was looking anxious; his wife had informed him of the incidents that occurred at the Asylum for Young Girls; he feared the young pastor, for whom he had, to some extent, become answerable, might get into trouble on account of his indulgence; and he came for further details. He was not spared them:

"Well, what do you say now, M. le Syndic?" snapped Rabourin at him triumphantly, without giving him time to open his mouth. "Nice things going on in our commune, eh? Come now, tell us what you think of Mme. Massod de Bussens, who has nothing better to do than entertain fallen women?"

"I think she has a good heart," answered M. Quartier.

"Indeed," retorted M. Rabourin, winking maliciously. "Do you, now? Well, I think (he lowered his voice a little, frightened at passing sentence on a personage of such distinction) — I think she has lost

her head! There! And your pastor, who supports her—"

"The fact is—" began Mauseberg.

But M. Marquillier interrupted him, only to continue with more animation: "That he missed a fine opportunity of holding his tongue,—that stripling! A proof that palaver isn't everything in a pastor! There is nothing worse than indulgence— No pity for a girl that disgraces herself, say I. Get rid of such vermin at once and forever!"

"Good heavens! but you are severe!" said M. Quartier.

"You can never be too much so!" declared Rabourin—"And you would do well to inform your pastor of the fact!"

M. Quartier, seeing the turn things were taking, affected to get angry:

"My pastor! my pastor!" he cried. "He is yours, too, nom de nom! He has his opinions; that's his own business! He is responsible for them. Do you believe I whisper in his ear everything he ought to say and everything he ought to do? Besides, why not wait for the end? We don't know everything!"

"Oh!" exclaimed M. Marquillier, staring. "Do you know already who's the—"

"I know what I know!"

"Bah!" said Rabourin, to make him speak. "It must be one of those good-for-nothing foreign workmen who are such a nuisance in the town. I have

said over and over again that we should expel them! If they are beginning to bring shame on our charitable institutions, I warn you, M. le Syndic, that at the very next meeting of the Municipal Council I'll pitch an interpellation at you. You are responsible for public order, surely!"

M. Quartier sneered.

"Yes, I am responsible for the pastor, I am responsible for order! You are going soon to make me responsible for your hats when they don't go off, Rabourin!"

He started to leave, with a loud laugh, which put his adversary out of countenance:

"All these things," he finished, "are mere little pebbles under the wheels of a good administration!"

And he went on his way, convinced that this time he had the best of it.

But the Sordes family was coming down now, the wife on her husband's arm and her daughter beside her. As they never went out in the evening, their appearance created a sensation.

"Where are they going?" asked M. Marquillier; "where are they going?"

"Ah!" sighed Rabourin, "there is a pastor whose principles may be relied on!"

"What a pity that people with such good principles are nearly always so stupid!" gibed the doctor.

The Sordes had come out merely for relaxation; for, in consequence of the afternoon meeting, M. Sordes

was very much excited. During the evening repast he never stopped thundering against the deadly theories of a pretentious and relaxed morality, in the presence of his wife and daughter.

"But they must reckon with me," he repeated; "they must reckon with me. I am on guard! If this new-comer fancies he can find an entrance here for his culpable weakness and his mock compassion, he is mistaken. He shall soon discover how things are! He shall find me erect before him and ready to maintain what is and what ought to be, our opinions and our good morals! If he wishes, it shall be war; war to the knife!"

Mme. Sordes raised her eyes to heaven.

"If it is God's will, my dear!" she sighed. "But you are no longer young. You must spare your strength and avoid emotions that exhaust you."

"Spare my strength! Much that concerns me! I will remain on the breach as long as there is a breath of life in me! Until now, I have always accomplished the triumph of the good cause. It shall triumph once more, if the Lord sustains me!"

"What do you intend doing?"

"What do I intend doing? I do not know; but I shall get the better of him!"

Mme. Sordes bent her head; the figures of the five pastors her husband had driven out of the parish passed across her memory. She thought of the struggles, intrigues, anxieties, of all the quarrelsome diplomacy these

victories represented, and, sighing again, she ventured to say:

"Still, your colleague does not look as if he were inclined to be troublesome — if we were to live in peace with him."

"I am not the one that courts disunion," replied the pastor, dryly.

Mme. Sordes noticed that Jeanne, usually so inattentive to what was passing around her, was listening to the conversation with visible interest. When M. Sordes went out, she followed him with a restless glance, which she then directed towards her mother.

"Mamma," she said, "is papa going to do him any harm?"

"Do harm to whom?"

"To the pastor?"

"Papa never does harm to any one, my child."

Jeanne plunged anew into her vague thoughts; then, when her mother was rising in turn, she murmured: "Oh! it is because he —" and remained a long time motionless before her plate, knitting her brows, as if she was trying to complete the idea that was forming in her poor mind.

This unlooked-for intervention of a passive creature, who never interfered in anything, and who hardly seemed to comprehend what was going on about her, began to disturb Mme. Sordes. Her anxiety was still further aggravated on the following Sunday, when Jeanne, reversing her usual indolent habits, was the first dressed for church, and came in search of her, repeating with the gestures of a delighted child:

"We are going to church to-day; we are going to church."

And she had put on a bright-colored ribbon round her neck.

For a moment Mme. Sordes had the idea of leaving her at home. She took her with her nevertheless. On that day, in fulfilment of his duties as second pastor, M. Sordes had gone, in the midst of a horrible rainstorm, to preach in one of the villages of the suburbs.

Trembloz, his mind still full of the incidents in the asylum, had chosen the text, "Judge not, lest ye be judged." He was not as successful as on the preceding Sunday; his congregation was distrustful and on its guard, and this phrase, like a kind of password, was circulating through the close ranks:

"Eloquence is all very well. But —"

Nevertheless, the last part of his discourse, in which he recalled the examples of indulgence given by Jesus Christ, produced a powerful effect, and he sat down amid a long murmur of admiration. At that moment Jeanne Sordes rose up suddenly from her bench, her eyes starting from her head and her arms extended, gave one cry, and fell back fainting. Her mother and Mme. Trembloz, who happened to be on the same bench, hastened to her side immediately, and half carried, half led her out in the midst of a murmur and agitation that for a time interrupted the continuance of the service. Then the prayers and the canticles resounded peacefully under the vaults of the

old church, and the crowd passed out, commenting on this new incident.

The attention which she gave Jeanne furnished Mme. Trembloz with an excuse she had long sought for penetrating into the household of the Sordes. She went in the afternoon, without giving her son a hint of her intention, and rang at their door to make inquiries as to the health of the sick girl. She was received with rather cold politeness, although they overwhelmed her with thanks. She used all her artifices to find out the cause of Jeanne's indisposition.

"It was so warm in that church," she said; "so warm! And then the spring has come on us, has it not? It is so easy to be made ill by the changes of the seasons! Why, I myself have —"

She went into details about the little troubles she suffered, returned to Jeanne, asked if she was subject to such attacks; and her cunning eyes were all the time observing the embarrassment of Mme. Sordes, who answered with hesitation, forced as she was to say more about her daughter than she would have wished, then to talk of herself, of her husband, who was roaming about the villages, of the laborious nature of the second pastor's duties. She said to herself:

"This woman is very inconsiderate;" but she did not venture to dismiss her, subdued by her domineering manner, by the sharpness she fancied in her, and by that kind of fear experienced in the presence of certain tenacious, stirring and despotic persons, espe-

cially if we believe it is safer to keep on good terms with them. At last, Mme. Trembloz beat a retreat; as her neighbor, perhaps hoping to dazzle her by her fine company airs, had her shown out by her maid, she profited by the circumstance to gossip a little with the latter, standing on the threshold and watching the rain outside. The familiarity natural to persons of the same condition united them at once.

"That poor young lady!" said Mme. Trembloz, "if you had seen her in church this morning — you can't imagine how pale she was! White as a sheet, I assure you! It was I who received her in my arms when she fell. For, at first, her mother lost her head."

Then, abruptly, with an air of great innocence: "But what in the world ailed her? Do you know?"

The girl smiled with a sly air:

"You may be sure I know!"

And, after a pause, to produce the full effect:

"She is in love with your son, that's all!"

Mme. Trembloz stared:

"Bah!"

The other continued from the abundance of her heart:

"Oh, you may depend upon it; trust me to know all about it! Why, when they came back she had another attack. You ought to have seen her! My, didn't she weep and scream and sob! And then she called for him, by his name, too! After that, madame sent me away, locked the door, and I heard nothing

more. But they must have had a warm time of it, mustn't they! That is all I can tell you!"

"Thanks, my good girl; you will tell me how things are going, won't you?"

She returned quite absorbed, with a flood of ideas beating in her brain; and she said to her son, with an air of resolution:

"You don't know why poor Mlle. Sordes fainted?"

"No."

"Guess a little."

"Oh, let me hear what you mean."

"Well, then, it is because she is in love with you."

He smiled sadly. "Poor girl! In her state, and with her appearance —"

"Oh, her appearance, — that's nothing. And then, perhaps, after all, she isn't as foolish as people say. In any case, think the matter over. M. Sordes, you understand —"

She shook her head to emphasize the great advantages that must surely follow such a close connection between him and M. Sordes.

"I assure you, mother," he said, "that if I marry —"

And she did not let him continue. "Yes, yes! I know what you are going to tell me! But we have plenty of time to talk of that. It is a thing that requires reflection, and we are in no hurry, are we? And then, you know the proverb, 'Never say, Fountain, I will not drink of your waters!' Don't swear you will not do a thing which you might afterwards want to do, after all!"

CHAPTER XVIII

Charity is Love

EVERY day Trembloz asked himself if he might, without exhibiting too marked an eagerness, call on the Massods de Bussens. In the morning he consulted his mother:

"Do you think I ought to go to the Tilleuls to-day?"

"Yes, decidedly. Go there, by all means!"

But he let the hours slip by, and in the evening said:

"I have had no time," — although in reality his occupations by no means sufficed for the entire day. He rose early from old habit, and devoted the morning to reading or work; the afternoons were spent in visiting the poor or attending the meetings of various committees; in the evening he resumed his reading, unless invited out by some of the notables of the place, a thing that occurred often, for every one wanted to know the new pastor; and although social life was but partially developed in the little town, he received not less than three invitations to "supper" the week after his second sermon. He accepted them, swayed by the thought: "She may be there!"

But she never was there; the Massods de Bussens

had but small taste for Biellian society; only once a year, about the middle of January, they invited the prefect, the syndic and three or four privileged persons; they received them with great ceremony, and it was over; they marked thus the wide gulf that separated them from their fellow-burgesses, and played their part like the great nobles their ancestors. However, at the meeting of the school committee, of which he had just been made a member, Trembloz met M. Massod de Bussens, who told him with all the affability of which he was capable, that they were expecting him at the Tilleuls. Delighted at the warm revival of the invitation, which banished all his doubts, he excused himself for his delay on account of his numerous occupations, and promised a speedy visit. On the next day he took his way to the hospitable mansion.

He met Maurice on the road, very late, and running as if he thought he might be in time and as if two o'clock had not struck a long time ago. The child was bathed in perspiration, for he had been hunting a butterfly, and still excited by the chase, he said:

"It was a Sylvanus! I am sure of it. You know one of those beautiful butterflies that have black wings with white spots. They are ever so rare! Jacques Quartier has one in his collection. I have none; I have never seen one even, for Jacques won't show me his."

Trembloz interrupted him in a kindly voice:

"You are a full half-hour late."

The child was astonished and alarmed.

"You don't think it?"

"But I do! It is half-past two at the very least."

Maurice pulled out his watch, an old family repeater, massive enough to resist ill-usage, and his face expressed despair.

"Sure as you're born, I'm going to miss my Latin again!"

He was starting on another race. Trembloz stopped him:

"Do not overheat yourself; that would do you no good now."

The lad stood still, and, with an outburst of impulsive affection, said:

"You are my friend, you are! Shake hands — *au revoir!*"

And, after shaking the pastor's hand with all his might, he started again for town, often turning round and stopping to cut some caper.

The visitor was conducted into the little sitting-room on the ground floor, and Mme. Massod de Bussens came to him a few moments afterward. Her husband was not at home; he had set out for Geneva by the noon express, and would not be back till evening. She explained this in a natural tone, while he felt relieved of a fear he had not confessed to — that of seeing beside her the heavy person of her husband, swollen with importance and crushing him with his air of superiority — and experienced such a longing for real intercommunion between them, having so many unutterable things in his heart

that he stifled the usual commonplaces and took refuge in the intimacy of silence. She said to him:

"My husband will be deeply grieved — grieved indeed!"

He stammered:

"I am very sorry also — really sorry — not to meet him!"

At the same time, he lowered his eyes, for he felt he was telling a falsehood, and hastened to ask for information about Rose Charmot. And immediately they both blushed at the same time; their common pity was already uniting them in a sort of complicity.

"Poor girl!" said Antoinette, "she is very unhappy!"

He asked, speaking as a pastor:

"Has she a sense of the sin she committed? Does she repent of her fault?"

Mme. Massod lowered her voice:

"She has at last confessed the name of her seducer," she said in a tone that was half confidential. "He is a young man who could marry her if he wished. I shall call on him and endeavor to arrange the affair."

He was moved, and exclaimed:

"You are good!"

She waved the compliment aside, and continued: "Perhaps you might help me. He would pay more attention to your words than to mine, I think."

"Oh! if I can do anything for this poor girl, I shall be glad to do so with all my heart."

They looked at each other; he continued: "I admired your courage the other day. For it required a good deal of courage to show mercy where every one was so severe. There may be more ignorance than vice in the fault of this poor child. When I saw with what cruelty they cast the stone at her, I thought how very far we are from true Christianity. The Master was more pitiful. Consequently I felt a little remorseful after the meeting; I thought I ought to have defended her with more energy."

She immediately excused him:

"You could hardly have done more. Only consider! you have scarcely more than just come amongst us. One has to humor the opinions and manners of this little world of ours. Besides, the few words you did say ought to have been enough to show them the true course. I know they showed me mine."

She was charming while speaking thus, her calm features illuminated with a ray of all-embracing goodness.

"I believe it was rather your good heart!" he murmured.

She smiled.

"No, I do not believe I have a better heart than other people. Mme. Sordes, Mme. Tiercet and even Mme. Quartier are excellent women, who desire nothing better than to do good. Only, it is hard, for one who has not erred, to comprehend a fault. Put yourself in the place of our friends of the committee; they are persons

of ripe age, who have been leading lives of absolute correctness for a very long time. They are unacquainted with evil, with temptation. How could they excuse it? They are like M. Sordes, really and simply virtuous, but with a vision bounded by a limited horizon. I have not judged as they did, but I should not care to blame them."

He drank in her words, he weighed their meaning; they revealed to him a very pure soul, a very noble understanding, and a heart full of tenderness and compassion.

"It seems to me, however, that if we only comprehended the true spirit of Christianity, we should judge like you, rather than like them."

"Well, we should at all events be charitable! Yes, charitable above everything, for Christianity is all charity, all love —"

He paused at this word, which assumed in his mind another sense, disquieting and forbidden; in a moment he looked at Antoinette, and felt at once reassured. With head a little bent forward, with her pale face so calm and serene, and the transparency of her complexion and of her candid eyes, she seemed, in her attitude of tranquil dignity, some immaterial form, inaccessible to evil desires, which must be scattered by the faintest contact with such purity. Though he had been before unconsciously subdued by her magic witchery, Henri now, for the first time, saw her beauty; but no sensual thought mingled with his admiration; why then should

he refuse himself the joy of offering her a homage that was altogether reverential, and thus elevating his own heart, sheltered from all peril?

Antoinette, however, let some moments pass; as if to give him time for the enjoyment of this furtive sentiment which nothing yet tarnished. Then she answered, without allowing the softness of her voice to be impaired by the half severity of her words:

"We must not exaggerate; love and charity ought not to lead to criminal indulgence. I should not like you to misunderstand me. I do not excuse this unfortunate girl; I pity her; that's all. And if I take an interest in her fate, it is because I think she may be saved."

Had she, then, divined his obscure thoughts — thoughts not yet reduced to form, moving about hither and thither unseen in the deep recesses of his heart and making him already feel compassionate towards the failings of others in order to render him compassionate towards himself? He turned away his eyes without answering Mme. Massod de Bussens, and changed the conversation.

"Your household arrangements are all completed now?" she asked, after a short silence.

Trembloz hastened to enter into some details:

"Yes, madame, our preparations did not give us much trouble. Our furniture, which was very modest, is lost in the vast apartments of the parsonage, for we have quite a fine house. And my mother absolutely insists on taking entire charge of the housekeeping.

My good mother has certain habits which I should like to see her lose her liking for. But she will listen to no arguments, and I am afraid to oppose her."

"You are very fond of her?"

This question astonished him, for he had never put it to himself.

"Yes, undoubtedly," he replied.

At the same time he suddenly discovered in himself shades of sentiment of which he was ignorant. A little frightened at what he was thinking and at what he was about to say, but hurried on by the irresistible longing for absolute candor, which he experienced in her presence, he glided imperceptibly down the slope of secret confidences:

"Nevertheless, we are so different, she and I. During my childhood, during my boyhood, there was never any intimacy between us. For that matter, it was the same with my brother and sister. Sometimes I said to myself that I was a stranger to them all; I thought they did not love me."

As she was questioning him with her eyes, he continued:

"You are surprised! But how could it be otherwise? They were toiling in the fields and I was busy with my studies. In reality they took me for an idler, although I was generally up earlier than they in order to be at my books. They despised my labor, and accused me of despising theirs, and there was some truth in it. Every year my father threatened to put a stop to my studies,

saying that I would be more useful on the farm, and I was terribly afraid he would execute his threat. Then my mother took my part; but — but she did so without showing me any affection. She was never satisfied. When I felt worn out, she would bring me books, scolding me as a lazy fellow, just like the others. She did not scold me, though, when I came out first at the examinations. She would have wished me to have all the prizes at once. In all this I could not perceive any tenderness, and I wanted tenderness so much! I read a great deal in a desultory way. My reading developed ideas, feelings, which my own people could not understand, and I was foolish enough to show this sometimes. Hence quarrels, misunderstandings. Ah! parents should never bring up their children to fill a position different from their own!"

While listening to him she was thinking of her own isolated youth, of her great longings for affection, always repressed and never yet satisfied; but she told him nothing of them, for women abandon themselves less willingly than men do to frank disclosures of this kind, which for them would be almost confessions. She was contented to enjoy in her heart these traits of resemblance between their two destinies. Then, feeling her delicacy a little ruffled by his last words, she asked:

"It is not possible that you regret being what you are?"

"Ah, no!" he quickly exclaimed, "most certainly, no! That is not what I mean. At bottom I am really

grateful to my mother for what she has done for me. For I love my profession; I am devoted to it heart and soul — although I have had, like so many others, my days of discouragement, my hours of doubt."

He was going to relate to her that painful crisis when the revolt of his spirit had for a moment dragged his conscience through the horrors of unbelief. A feeling of bashfulness restrained him. He resumed:

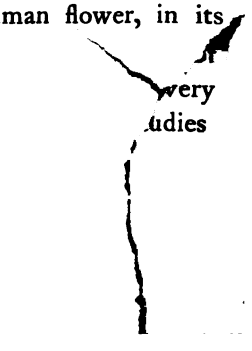
"But I am speaking too much about myself, madame. I am abusing your kindness, and have taken up your attention too long. It is time I took my leave."

"Already?"

The word had escaped from her. As if to modify it, perhaps also to prolong the pleasure this visit gave her without seeming to do so, she added:

"Would you not like to become acquainted with our 'campagne'? You hardly know it yet."

He accepted. They went together through the old garden divided into beds all blooming with the flowers of spring, among them many of those old-fashioned blossoms now rarely found even in village gardens, but to which Antoinette was very partial. She told him their technical names and related their history. And he observed her as she bent over the plants and took the delicate roses between her white fingers to have them admired, herself like a flower, a human flower, in its full bloom, perfect and fresh.



CHAPTER XIX

The White Rocks

They left the garden. They strolled through an alley of Persian lilacs whose lingering clusters scented the air. They crossed an orchard planted with trees in flower. They entered a little wood, the beeches of which were scarcely covered with fine tender leaves.

"This is my forest," she said. "You are going to penetrate its mysteries!"

The dead branches that strewed the path crackled under his feet.

"How pretty your 'campagne' is!" exclaimed Trembloz. "Everything here is delicious, it is a little world in itself. You have a stream —"

"Only we are no longer in our own territory. There is no barrier, but we are in the Bois-Joli, which belongs to the commune. This makes it a little unpleasant for us on Sunday, but on other days it is just as if it belonged to ourselves, we never meet any one. And this is the part of it I prefer, so I must show it to you."

The landscape took on an almost savage appearance; pines succeeded beeches; then, in a sort of clearing, two rocks rose up above them, towering, shading with their strange forms a very old stone bench.

"They are the White Rocks," said Antoinette. As Henri looked at her as if expecting an explanation, she added:

"You never heard of them?"

"No."

"Well, they have their legend. A legend that dates away far back to the middle ages, to the times when the country was still Catholic, when there were convents."

"Please relate it."

"I will try to."

She collected herself for a moment, and began, with some hesitation:

"There was once a very noble lord who became a monk through disappointment in love. He entered a convent, the ruins of which you can still see not far from here. You know, that at the other side of the town there was also in those times a convent of nuns. Now, one of these nuns was the woman he loved but could not marry. How did they manage to see each other again? The legend does not say — or, at least, I do not know. But it happened that the old love they believed dead awoke in their hearts. And then — then —"

She stopped, appeared to be trying to remember something for a moment and shook her head.

"No," she said, "I am sure I do not recollect the legend well — I should spoil it. Get some one else to tell it to you."

She was troubled.

"What if we were to go on? A few steps upwards, and you have a beautiful view."

It was beautiful; beyond the trees, the eyes embraced, through the spaces between them, a large part of the lake, and then rested on a corner of the Alps, peaceful and familiar, on the rounded summits which, near Geneva, descend in billowy swells until they are confounded with the plain. The pines and beeches of the Bois-Joli formed with their boughs a fantastic frame for this landscape, which seemed some colossal picture hung in the infinite of the heavens by a sovereign master; yet, in spite of its immensity, not spoiling the familiar aspect of the silent and enclosed scene before them.

"I am very fond of this spot," murmured Mme. Massod de Bussens, stopping.

"Yes," replied Trembloz, almost unconsciously, "there is something of yourself in it."

She turned away her eyes and looked vaguely into space. So slippery already had the declivity which attracted them to each other become that their slightest words assumed a mysterious significance. The silence troubled them still more. They heard their own thoughts in it; thoughts they would not have confessed to, and which yet roamed around them, like the light air, like the odor of the damp earth, the young sap, the plants in flower.

"The air is cool," she said, shivering. "It is not right to remain standing."

They tore themselves from their thoughts. She led

him back by another path, which was nearer and descended through the pines. She hurried on, as if to put a speedier end to their conversation. They did not try to speak. As they entered the orchard again, they saw one of the maids, who was searching for them. She announced that M. Leen was waiting for Mme. Massod in the garden. They hastened on, turned into the alley of the lilacs and soon distinguished the fine profile of M. Leen, who seemed to be studying the new buds with extreme attention. Raising his head, he saw her also, and approached with hat in hand. Trembloz thought him still more the elegant and perfect gentleman than when he saw him for the first time. He experienced a kind of awkwardness and uneasiness near him, and took leave as soon as he could.

"You are not going, surely?" said Antoinette.

"Yes, madame," he replied; "I have already abused your hospitality. Allow me to ask you to be the bearer of my compliments to M. Massod de Bussens."

He feared he was, perhaps, becoming tiresome to her, and this idea disturbed him so much that he grew pale, as if stricken by an abrupt and strong emotion.

She thanked him. Then, when he was departing after saluting M. Leen, whose clear and penetrating eye inspired him with real terror, she added:

"I hope, monsieur, we shall have the pleasure of seeing you sometimes — often."

"If you permit me, madame."

"The more so that, as I told you, I shall need your

advice in connection with my protégée — and your support, perhaps."

He bowed and turned away. As he was leaving the garden he met Rose, who was playing in the yard with Nestor. Isolated in the house, regarded with distrust by the domestics, she had very quickly made friends with the enormous dog. At this moment she was making him jump, gambol and crouch before her; and, with her little foot placed on the iron collar of his neck, she posed like some triumphant stage queen, rippling with bright, careless laughter as if she were the happiest of girls. Trembloz would have liked to address a few words to her, but he was so disconcerted by her levity that he avoided looking at her.

Turning round towards the garden he saw Mme. Massod de Bussens and M. Leen again, strolling arm in arm towards the entrance to the sitting-room. As they had their backs to him, and, moreover, appeared to be absorbed in an animated chat, Henri observed them for some seconds; they were walking slowly on the gravel of the alleys; then Antoinette paused before a rose bush, selected a bud ready to bloom, and with a charming gesture offered it to her companion, who adorned his buttonhole with it at once. Trembloz felt as if something was stabbing his heart, while, with irresistible suddenness, a whole crop of frightful suspicions and poisonous thoughts sprang up within him. In the twinkling of an eye he had traversed an entire ocean of degrading suppositions; this woman who a moment ago

seemed so pure; whose presence inspired him only with chaste rapture, in whose presence he believed his soul grew better and his heart nobler, this woman was now sullied with all the suggestions of an exasperated jealousy. Base insults rose to his lips, while a vertigo of madness made him stagger behind the gateway he had just closed. It was a dreadful crisis, lasting a few seconds or a few minutes; he awoke from it as from some nightmare spun out of fear and horror, but, enlightened as to the storm that was gathering in the depths of his being. Then this cry burst forth from his anguish:

"Do I love her! My God! do I love her!"

And he resumed his walk, crushed by the shock of this discovery, put to shame by the flashes of infamy that had just revealed it to him, stiffening his moral fibres to repel his newborn suspicions and his lax desires, then, little by little, reconquered by a great wave of gentleness that swept away all this foulness, by ideas of devotion, self-denial and pure tenderness that soothed his wounded imagination.

CHAPTER XX

The Spirit and the Flesh

TREMBLOZ shuddered at the thought of returning home, where his mother was waiting for him, and would be sure to ask painful questions; and he meditated sadly on his fate; others have a family which loves them, in which they find comfort and support; he was, as it were, alone; the only bond that united him to his mother was that of duty; for, as if she were a creature of another race, she spoke another language than his. They did not understand each other; she tried his temper, irritated him. For the past week, there had been trouble about Jeanne Sordes. The matrimonial plans which the old woman had conceived, though at first very vague, were taking shape, were becoming rooted in her rugged head; she had willed this thing with all the greedy furiousness of her ambition, with all the roughness of her energy; and she pursued her aim, according to her means, constantly repeating the same arguments, as if she reckoned on conquering by a siege.

"Surely," said Henri to himself, "she will speak of that again."

So, instead of returning to the parsonage, he turned

into a lonely little road that runs along the old ramparts of the town. He crossed the railroad track, leaving the station on his right, into which an express was just entering, and found himself on the long, dusty highway leading to the Jura, through orchards bright with flowers. The evening was falling; a sun, whose last reddish gleams would purple heights farther on, was descending below the gloomy line of the mountains, bathed in shadow, all black about the rounded summit of the Dôle, still covered with snow and of a livid whiteness.

Henri strode on, as if the thoughts that were beating in his head were also treading on his heels. He was trying to see clearly into himself, and found there only mysteries as impenetrable as the shadow of the mountains, which was moving toward him and would soon enfold him. With that natural capacity for inventing facile images which oratorical habits give, he compared himself to a bird wandering in the night, to a ship beaten by opposing winds. Good heavens, yes! He dwelt a moment on this metaphor, commonplace, indeed, but how accurate! His whole being exulted with joy and leaped towards some guiding beacon of hope, like a shipwrecked sailor invited to an enchanted shore. Then he fell back immediately, for was not the love whose radiance shone before him a disaster a thousand times worse than death, something criminal and shameful, a devouring wound that would eat away his soul? "He who looketh with desire on his neighbor's wife hath already committed adultery with her in his heart."

Ah! the sin had taken hold of him! In vain he sought to paint it with flattering colors; in vain he tried to feel his soul ennobled, his heart enlarged, all on fire with a universal charity which he endeavored to render boundless, the better to shelter his guilty desires. These are the snares of the evil one, the mirages he displays before our eyes, the false appearance he weaves around our feeble hearts. Woe to those who do not free themselves from them by some quick, imperious action, like the old knights, whose faith destroyed the enchanted gardens of their fairy tempters.

The darkness was growing thicker, extending over the plain and filling the sky. Trembloz looked at his watch.

"It is late," he said to himself; "my mother is perhaps anxious."

And the thought of the old woman suddenly touched his feelings; he was angry with himself on account of the reproaches he had addressed to her a while ago; he promised to fulfil all the duties he owed her. Turning his back on the Jura, whose black outlines were becoming more indistinct, he continued his way to Bielle. And, as if to reduce the thoughts that were harrowing him to a plain form, he said in a loud voice:

"I will never see her again — never!"

This oath relieved him. He experienced during the rest of the evening the calmness due to sacrifice accomplished, the peace of conscience given by a painful and firm resolution when adopted with such sincerity that

we believe it irrevocable. And he listened with patience to the discourse of his mother, who, after insisting on an account of his employment of the afternoon, returned to her plans for the future, erected the scaffolding of her ambitious dreams, and arranged the scale on which his fortunes were to be built. He hardly answered, but did not contradict her.

"You understand," she explained, "that marriage completes a man, gives him his true position — particularly when he is of humble origin and without fortune, as you are. Your whole future depends on it. It must be looked at on its serious and practical side. A woman too beautiful or too clever is good for nothing! The main point is what she brings you."

She reckoned up the advantages, moral and material, such as would be the dowry of Jeanne Sordes, but nevertheless she did not call her by name, for she saw that if he could be convinced, it must be by a siege in all the forms and conducted with the greatest prudence. He appeared to be listening with his eyes fixed on her, but he was only repeating to himself the oath of a moment ago as a refrain that monopolized his attention to the exclusion of all other thoughts.

"I will never see her again — never!"

This phrase troubled him all the night, but gradually it lost its authority, its sternness. When he awoke, after a short and heavy sleep in the morning, which somewhat sobered his exaltation, it resounded more feebly in his calmer mind, like some noise which the distance

deadens. His passion seemed less dangerous, or he believed himself stronger. And, in the afternoon, he strolled about the streets of Bielle with the unavowed hope, at the bottom of his heart, of meeting Antoinette. He did not see her. But he met M. Massod de Bussens, who stopped him to express his regret at having missed his visit, and made him promise to call soon again. He promised; could he do otherwise? Yet he was still saying to himself:

"It would be better not to see her again — I will not see her again."

In fact, until the end of the week, he avoided going out at the hours when she might pass, and applauded himself for his loyalty.

But on Sunday, as soon as he was in the pulpit, his eyes, while running along the rows of the faithful, fell straight on Mme. Massod de Bussens, calm and motionless, in her accustomed place. He met her glance, which was seeking him, and the tumult which he had repressed was anew unchained in his soul. The slow harmonies of the psalm, strengthened by the organ's accompaniment, rose under the vaults:

"To Thy beloved Thou always givest peace.
Jacob has seen the captives drop their chains;
Thine anger for Thy children's sins shall cease,
And pity melt the heart where justice reigns."

Was this humble temple, then, the place where a storm should rage in the heart? Was it right that the obscure servants of God should implore His grace and

await His benediction, and that he who alone spoke in His name should be beaten by the tempest of guilty desires? The canticle ceased, the last vibrations of the organ were hushed; the pastor, standing, towering above the assembly, read mechanically the words of the liturgy, in which the soul, overwhelmed by sin, confesses its unworthiness.

"Lord God, eternal and almighty Father, we acknowledge and we confess before Thy sacred majesty that we are miserable sinners, born in corruption, inclined to evil, incapable by ourselves of any good, and who transgress every day and in divers ways Thy holy commandments."

He scanned the phrases with the customary inflections and pauses; and the effort which he made, and the grave words which fell on the silent and attentive congregation, restored him sufficient calmness to enable him to preach without visible effort. He had selected the text: "God is Love." As always was the case, the intoxication of his words hurried him on; he departed from his plan; he abandoned his text, while the love that swelled his heart overflowed in impetuous streams of lyrical imagery that reminded one of the ancient mystics. Never before had such words descended from the modest pulpit to pass like a wind of fire over an astonished audience, suddenly shaken in the prosaic routine of its faith. The syndic Quartier, leaning forward in his stall, opened his big eyes to their widest, as if his great, hairy ears no longer sufficed to enable him to hear.

M. Tiercet, his neighbor, abandoned his usual taciturnity to whisper to him in the midst of the sermon:

"He has too much fire."

While Dr. Mathorel said under his breath to M. Marquillier:

"Fine, isn't it? He speaks of God as one would speak of a woman! I like that — rather!"

Trembloz concluded without having any idea of the sensation he created. He sat down, wiping his forehead; while the precentor intoned the canticle he had himself just indicated:

> "O Lord, my spirit is athirst,
> But now no more with pleasures vain."

Though he tried to control his eyes, they turned of their own motion towards the woman who invited them. She was not singing, she had not even opened her psalm-book; dumb, with motionless face, with all her soul in the great eyes that were riveted on him, she was crying to him, speaking heart to heart, abolishing the distance that separated her from him, in an ecstasy of rapture that destroyed all sense of places and persons. He understood that he had spoken for her alone and that she comprehended; then, in the depths of his heart he groaned:

"Ah! I am a wretch! Lord, Lord, have mercy on me!"

But up to the end of the service he was incapable of governing his thoughts any longer. He muttered the

liturgy mechanically, in a lifeless voice. His eyes invincibly returned there where his heart was. When he descended from the pulpit, he felt as weak as a child, entirely overcome and ripe for all the weaknesses of our nature. He had sworn to himself that he would not see her again, and he had seen her, and spoken to her! Alas! and he would see her again, again speak to her unceasingly, there, even in that house of God where his duty called him. Ah! what had happened to him then, and how would his torture end!

CHAPTER XXI

They have the Same Enemy

AFTER he had left the church by the little door which led directly to the parsonage, Trembloz met M. Leen, who was watching for him, and came to meet him. The sight of the American awoke in his troubled breast the keen remembrance of the jealous crisis some days before, which had revealed to him his passion. But he had recovered from that frenzy; which now seemed to him an infamy; he had banished his suspicions, which no longer tarnished the purity of the beloved image; it was therefore without any mental reservation that he clasped the hand offered to him. M. Leen was come to ask him if he could see his way to giving Latin lessons to his two children, and he apologized for making the proposition with delicate courtesy.

"I know it lies outside the sphere of your occupations, monsieur; but I am not satisfied with the Latin master at the college. I do not know whom to apply to, and I should have been much embarrassed if M. Massod de Bussens had not suggested that you might, perhaps, consent to render me this service for the few months I shall spend in Bielle."

Immediately Trembloz understood that by accepting he would be drawing nearer to Antoinette; he would often take the road that led to the Tilleuls, he would meet her, perhaps, sometimes on the way; he would pass before her gateway, her courtyard, under her windows. An hour earlier, still faithful to his oath of never seeing her again, he would have refused. But, since it was his fate to meet her everywhere, what was the use? — He consented.

M. Leen thanked him.

"When does it suit you to begin, monsieur?"

"I think, perhaps — when you wish — to-morrow, if you like."

"Let it be to-morrow then."

Trembloz believed his shrewd companion had a gleam of irony in his eye, as if he might suspect his secret; and, to show an interest in his future pupils, he asked:

"Have your children any knowledge of Latin at present, monsieur?"

"Oh, very little; only as much as I taught them myself, and I hadn't a great deal of spare time for it; they know their declensions and verbs, and I think that's all."

And M. Leen turned away, after repeating his thanks.

The first lesson was big with surprises for the improvised master. Having passed through the education of the college, and never having known any young people

except those brayed in the same mortar, he would never have been able to suspect that there were such beings as Maud and Francis. The two children differed much from each other. Maud, with her pretty, irregular features, her chestnut hair, cut short, her audacious high collar and masculine jacket, with her free gestures, her confident voice and clear laugh, looked like a quick, joyous, turbulent boy, while Francis, somewhat more blond, with whiter complexion and calmer manners, had, at moments, in his pose or language, the gentle ways of the quiet, well-behaved little girl; but they were alike in their curiosity, always on the alert in their frankness and freedom, each developing as nature willed.

Nothing in them recalled those unfortunate little creatures, punished often out of season by their masters, tormented by their comrades, unless they themselves are the tormentors, reduced to one flat, common level, stupefied by routine, that people our boarding-schools, lyceums and colleges. At fourteen and twelve they were already possessed of a character, and their individuality was beginning to blossom. At every moment they were shooting ahead of the grammar, and Trembloz followed them, perfectly enchanted, but with a shade of anxiety and a fear that they were sitting in judgment upon him. When he had admired them for an hour and a half, he communicated his impressions to their father, who heard him with phlegmatic and comprehensive good nature, although with a slight touch of haughtiness.

"Your children are charming, monsieur. I have never seen any like them."

M. Leen smiled.

"That is exactly my opinion, M. le Pasteur. I do not care to hide it from you. But not every one can understand them. My daughter especially surprises many people. They ask me what I intend to make of her. How do I know? One of those Rosalinds, I hope, who are so delightful in the comedies of Shakespeare. Meanwhile she astounds her neighbors, who are afraid of her. Oh, it's a fact! M. Massod de Bussens never feels quite safe when he sees her coming into his house; her costume makes him open his enormous eyes wider than would seem possible, and he looks as if he might have a fit of anger every time that Francis joins in the conversation of his elders."

"The fact is," said Trembloz, "that his son is not brought up on the same principles."

"Ah! poor lad; I can well believe it!" exclaimed M. Leen. "Nevertheless, he is an exquisite little fellow, although of another sort than mine. A sensibility which asks nothing except to be allowed to expand, and which he has to hide as soon as he sees his father. There is so much good-will and tenderness in the lad, all the poetry of childhood. Happily, he has his mother."

Desirous of speaking of her, and somewhat agitated, Trembloz stammered:

"Mme. Massod de Bussens is a charming woman."

Immediately he regretted the words, as if in their very triteness they might betray him, and he avoided the look of M. Leen, who answered with a certain warmth:

"A woman of heart and intellect — consequently, her son leaves to her the task of satisfying his great longing for affection. There is perfect harmony between these two beings; their lives and thoughts are one. And then —"

M. Leen hesitated a moment, like a man who does not care to make himself the mouthpiece of the confession of others. Nevertheless, he glided down the slope he had ventured on; he said rapidly:

"They have the same enemy."

Trembloz looked at him inquiringly, repeating:

"The same enemy?"

"Yes — Oh! an enemy who is not an enemy, if you like. An enemy courteous enough in his way. An enemy very highly respected, especially an enemy with whom it is in accordance with the etiquette of good society to play the comedy of affection — you understand?"

Trembloz, frightened by this rather free and unprejudiced analysis, murmured:

"I do not know."

M. Leen continued:

"Oh! I have no doubt if you told our good little Maurice that he does not like his father he would be very much astonished. If Mme. Massod de Bussens were told that she does not like her husband, she

would be indignant. And if M. Massod was told that he was a cruel tyrant to his son and wife, he would believe us mad, quite simply! Still, all this is true!"

Henri drank in these singular words, which were, for him, full of unexpected revelations. He wished to know more. He asked awkwardly:

"Are the members of the family on bad terms with one another, then?"

In a flash, M. Leen saw that he had allowed himself to be carried too far in his fondness for psychology. With a vigorous gesture of denial and protest, he resumed, but with more reserve:

"I did not say that! I did not say that! Nothing would authorize me to say that, nor to believe it. It is one of these households whose members do not know one another well. There are many such, in which respect, custom, mutual good-will take the place of affection. But I am afraid we are gossiping. Now, you don't think that quite right, do you, M. le Pasteur? Although there is really nothing more amusing than watching how your neighbor lives."

Thereupon, he shook hands with Trembloz, who took leave, disquieted by so much penetration as well as by what he had just learned.

CHAPTER XXII

A Fierce Struggle

He had not taken a hundred steps on the road when he recognized Mme. Massod de Bussens and Maurice, returning from town. The young lad perceived him also, for he let his mother's hand go and ran up to him with the spontaneous sprightliness and caressing eagerness of a young dog.

"Oh! am I not glad to see you, dear, dear monsieur; dear M. Trembloz, my own dear friend! And isn't mamma glad, too! Come and bid her good day!"

He had seized his hands and was frisking around him and dragging him along with a familiarity that was rather confusing, all the time firing questions at him with his usual impetuosity.

"By the way, tell us about Maud — and Francis. Did Maud wear her boy's collar? She is funny, isn't she, with her boys' collars? Reading Cæsar already, my! Do they chatter during the lesson? Can Francis keep quiet? Oh, now, monsieur, don't tell that to me! Oh, aren't they lucky, not to go to college, and have you for their master!"

The child never waited for an answer. Henri, whom

he was pulling and hauling, had a great deal of difficulty in maintaining a dignified demeanor when he was face to face with Mme. Massod de Bussens. She offered her hand, excusing Maurice.

"He is a terrible child when he gets his own way! Pardon him, monsieur, I beseech you; don't answer his silly questions."

Trembloz stammered:

"But, madame, I assure you —"

She smiled.

"Oh! I know how lenient you are to him, too much so."

They had met just in front of the entrance to the Tilleuls. After they had remained silent a few moments, Antoinette added, hurriedly:

"Au revoir, dear monsieur! au revoir, my dear friend!"

"Why did she fly so quickly, exchanging a few phrases scarcely, without a word of sympathy or a kind look?"

This puzzling question, which Trembloz put to himself the very moment the gate closed behind Maurice, effaced the impressions made upon him by the Leen family, although these impressions had, to some extent, engrossed his mind before he met Madame Massod de Bussens; he was inattentive to his mother's remarks in consequence of it, and, during the rest of the day, it troubled him incessantly. What was the significance of this careless parting? Had he, without suspecting

it, disappointed or offended his friend? or might it be that she, distrustful of her own heart, as he was of his, was wrestling with the same arms against the same sentiment? Tossed backwards and forwards between these extreme conclusions, he felt a terrifying desire growing within him to see her again, to question her eyes, her voice, to read and divine what was in her soul. A night that seemed to have no end brought with it a confused medley of frightful images that defiled through his over-excited brain, and became hideous nightmares during the moments he dropped into a half slumber. Towards morning, during a dull, heavy fit of drowsiness, his visions took a character they never had before; he writhed on his pillow, with a mad desire like the temptation that assails an ascetic. He jumped out of bed, opened the shutters, wildly eager for the dawn, which was scarcely breaking, bathing in the air, the cool caresses of which made him shiver; and recognizing all his misfortune, which seemed to him endless, he groaned with shame and despair in the solitude of his poor chamber:

"Lord, Lord, have mercy on me!"

He rose late. His mother at first scolded him:

"Upon my word, this is a pretty hour to be getting out of bed! Your coffee is cold; so much the worse for you!"

But Henri was so pale, so downcast and exhausted, that although she was not easily moved by trifles, she interrupted her reproaches to say with some anxiety:

"What is the matter with you? Are you ill?"

"No; nothing is the matter; I am quite well."

When she began to discourse on divers matters connected with the housekeeping, and was commencing one of her long stories about the misdeeds of shopkeepers, the bad treatment she received from neighbors, he stopped her with an impatient gesture, though always so gentle to her, so respectful:

"Ah! not now, mother, I beg you! — not now!"

And he fled into his study without finishing his bowl of coffee and milk.

CHAPTER XXIII

The Road to Tilleuls

He passed several hours there with the same thoughts which his vain efforts to banish only rendered the more oppressive; he tried to write and could not, could not concentrate his thoughts, which always came back to turn in the same circle. He thought of his next Sunday's sermon; to prepare it seemed impossible to him. Then he began rummaging among his notes to see if he could come across some old discourse that would be available. The sheets, already half yellow, revived some faded memories; he recalled the halls of learning where, with unsteady voice and hesitating gestures, he uttered his phrases learned by heart and with the cadences supposed to be according to the rules of sound oratory, or rather, the village temples, the little white churches standing amidst vineyards or barley fields, where the peasants, dressed in their Sunday clothes, worn out with their week's work, resting dully on the hard benches, heard him. It was an hour's distraction, a flight into the times that give comfort because they are no more. Then he measured the distance between the man of the past and the man he was now; and he asked himself with dismay:

"Is this really I? Am I myself?"

The town clock struck twelve. As he did not descend to dinner his mother came upstairs and called him.

"But you must not make yourself ill," she said, with unusual gentleness. "There are black rings about your eyes; you are working too hard."

He could not refrain from murmuring, as he heaped up the papers on the table:

"I do nothing!"

She grew anxious.

"You see well you are ill."

He turned his eyes away, for she was gazing upon him, and her gaze troubled him.

"I am tired," he said. "Besides, it is spring, and the change of season may affect me."

She continued to observe him, as if she had a presentiment of something unusual with him; she tried to read what it was in his face. When she shook her head with an air of doubt and rebuke, he grew impatient:

"I tell you nothing is the matter with me! Pray let me alone, once for all!"

She did not insist; they went down to the dining-room; the boiled beef was waiting for them; it was their usual dish, just as it had been at the farm. Henri swallowed his soup hurriedly, and remained before his plate, with eyes staring vacantly.

"You do not eat," urged the old woman.

He gave her a far-away look, and, almost shouting, answered:

"I do not eat! Why, I am dying with hunger!"

He forced himself to swallow a few mouthfuls, washed down with large bumpers of wine, without water:

"You see well that nothing ails me, nothing, nothing at all!"

When the meal was drawing towards an end, she said, tired of the silence in which he shut himself up:

"You forget there is a meeting of the hospital commission to-day at four."

He shrugged his shoulders:

"I shall not go!"

"Still—"

"No, I want to be left quiet."

He went up to his study, where his work of self-torment was renewed; nor did he this time even make impotent efforts to divert his attention.

Towards three, his mother, who usually entered abruptly, with that disregard for intellectual labor characteristic of those ignorant of it, knocked at the door.

She announced, almost timidly, that the Sordes were in the parlor, waiting for him. He raised his arms with a cry of despair:

"Can I never have peace!"

She answered:

"They are paying us a visit; don't you understand? It is very polite of them, I am sure. Don't you think so? Make haste and come down to see them!"

"But I am not dressed!"

"Dress yourself, then. They will wait awhile. I shall keep them company. I may tell them you are coming, may I not?"

He was not independent enough to persist in his refusal:

"Yes, I suppose I must come," he grumbled. And he put on his coat. What did his colleague want with him? After their discussion at the asylum, he thought he must be very badly disposed towards him, and he expected he would have to encounter some of the trials undergone by his predecessors.

"My mother is right," he thought to himself, hastening to finish his toilet. "It is better to have them for friends than for enemies. If they wish peace, I certainly do not wish war. Oh! no! — peace! — peace!"

This word, which he repeated mentally, received another coloring in his mind, and he could not help smiling at the absurd idea that took form for a moment.

"If M. Sordes knew!"

The visit was prolonged, for Mme. Trembloz had invited them to tea, and Henri was becoming very irritable before the end of it. Jeanne was in a dark corner, never speaking a word, as if in an ecstasy; when he looked in her direction, he saw her sitting quite motionless, not daring to breathe, with her eyes riveted on him, not taking the trouble, poor innocent that she was, to dissemble the instinctive feeling that drove her to his

side, trembling and mastered. Then he felt some pity for her:

"She suffers," he thought, "as I do."

He addressed a few words to her which made her blush and gasp; but she could not find anything to say in reply.

But Mme. Sordes tried to intimate to her daughter by her eyes the necessity of restraining herself, while M. Sordes, with his hands on his knees in a hieratic pose, was seeking for subjects of conversation. At wide intervals, laborious phrases dropped from him, dull and trite and almost meaningless. He spoke of the hospital, of the college, of the ancient statue back against the church, which some were in favor of transporting to the museum.

"The memorials of paganism are in their place there, and there alone!"

He spoke of the next municipal elections at which M. Rabourin would be a candidate in opposition to M. Quartier. But to the scene that took place at the asylum there was no allusion. Suddenly Trembloz became attentive. Mme. Sordes was saying, in a tone intended to be flattering:

"You often see the Massod de Bussens family, do you not, monsieur?"

He stammered:

"Often? Oh! no, madame; sometimes — only sometimes."

"M. Massod de Bussens is a very remarkable man,"

declared M. Sordes, "a man who does much good — a man specially designed by Providence to be an example as well as a benefactor to our town."

Was he going to speak of her? Henri hoped so. But, after a silence of a few moments, Mme. Sordes continued, now in a tone that betrayed suspicion:

"You see also those foreigners, those Americans who reside at Bois-Joli?"

At last they took their leave. Mme. Trembloz embraced Jeanne very warmly, and while looking after her, said, as if thinking aloud:

"That little girl is surely not handsome, but she is nice — and she is not proud!"

Her son did not appear to hear her. She questioned him:

"You are not going out, then?"

"No."

"You are working?"

"Yes."

For the third time he went up to his study, where she heard him tramping round and round in an endless promenade that made the ceiling shake.

After supper, seized with terror at the idea of again finding himself alone with himself in an apartment he had filled with his thoughts, and the air of which stifled him, Trembloz tried to talk with his mother. But he did not know what to say to her, and nothing she was saying could distract him: stories about the people of the town, whose lives she was already fully acquainted

with, or observations the sly malice of which annoyed him. At the usual hour for retiring, the recollection of his last night rose up and appalled him: then he could no longer keep still:

"I am going out. I am going for a walk. I must get into the open air!"

Bewildered by this new whim, she asked him at once:

"May I go with you?"

He was touched by her solicitude; however dull and uninteresting mothers may be, they have always those pitiful intuitions where their children are concerned. She gazed upon him with eyes that were almost beseeching and repeated:

"Let me go with you! I can see well that something is the matter with you. I may do you some good if I walk along with you."

He hesitated an instant and refused, but in a voice that had grown very tender:

"No, mother, thanks. You must be tired out. And then, I may as well tell you, it will do me good to be alone for a while."

He passed in front of the church; the threatened statue of the unknown empress attracted his eyes in the bright moonlight. Without calculating where he was going, he found himself in the main street, now absolutely deserted. At this moment the old Horloge struck ten amid the silence of the closed houses. He asked himself:

"What am I doing here?"

And mechanically he took the road to the Tilleuls.

CHAPTER XXIV

An Unavailing Plea

SINCE the time when her young girl's imagination sometimes played truant, never had Antoinette Massod de Bussens dreamt of love. Her marriage, accepted as an escape from her unpleasant position as an orphan, with, perhaps, some illusions, soon to be dispelled, was, as far as she was concerned, a practical and seemly, though dull, arrangement of her future existence, in which all her romantic aspirations died a natural death, without a struggle. Her husband was neither her lover nor her friend; he was a companion to be appreciated according to his value, and to be put up with because it was unavoidable; for the rest, her own gentleness and a certain indolence of soul led her to accept without protest the ascendancy which he insisted on exercising over her. Of a dogmatic temper and a callous heart, he imposed on her his own notions of life, notions very simple, for that matter, and all ultimately centring in his conception of duty. His ideas and acts always gravitated round this immutable axis. For his wife he had the indulgent affection it was the duty of a husband to have, for his son he had the severe affection it was the

duty of a father to have; he did the good it was the duty of a rich man to do; he fulfilled the functions it was the duty of a good citizen to fulfil. Nothing more, nothing less. He was so sure of himself, so persuaded that he was right, so convinced his social vision embraced everything deserving to be seen, that this certitude of his was shared by all in his neighborhood; his servants thought as he did; he never suspected that his wife could be so fantastical as to think differently. And, in fact, she had no idea of revolt; she was resigned, because no other aliment, except her daily and settled pittance, was dealt out to her. But lo! on a sudden, chance laid bare before her eyes a corner of space to which she was hitherto a stranger; she perceived all at once that there was in the world another man besides her husband, other sentiments besides those she was familiar with, other laws possible besides those of duty. Love appeared to her. In vain she banished the thought of it; it returned. Had she installed it by her hearth in the person of little Rose, whom she could not meet without being a prey to disquieting curiosity? Little Rose held the smallest place she possibly could in the household; her dominant preoccupation being to escape M. Massod de Bussens's eyes, which frightened her out of her wits. But she astounded her benefactress. The latter had, in truth, expected to see her overwhelmed with contrition. It was nothing of the sort. When once the emotion of the first hours was over, Rose was herself again; a merry creature, gentle and frivolous; a kind

of little bird, quickly alarmed, but which, when sheltered from hostile eyes, hops around and chirps incessantly. Seeking timidly to render herself useful in the house, or playing with Nestor, now her great friend, she neither seemed troubled about the future, nor repentant for her sin, nor ashamed of her situation. While her pretty face was already become drawn and pale, she was tranquilly waiting for the time when there would be other signs of her condition. This terrible, this irreparable fault, the penalty of which lasts a lifetime, and rebounds on the innocent, this dishonor of being an unwedded mother, left her indifferent, smiling and gay; so that, when some cloud shadowed for a moment her candid eyes, Antoinette simply said to herself that she was, perhaps, regretting her imprisonment within the Tilleuls.

After observing her for two or three days, Mme. Massod de Bussens, seeing that she was quite consoled and comforted, resumed the examination which had come to nothing at the asylum. Now it was quite otherwise. Rose showed herself ready to answer at the first question.

"Oh! yes, madame, I will tell everything to you; all that you like. It was M. Tiercet's clerk. He is from the same village I'm from. His name is Joseph Morand."

It all came so glibly, with hardly a trace of emotion, that Antoinette was bewildered.

"Why," she asked, "did you not tell his name to those ladies?"

"Oh! it is not the same thing! They would have tormented me, while I know you are so good!"

What questions Mme. Tiercet or Mme. Quartier would have put to her! They would have required to know minutely how the intrigue was begun, the places and number of their meetings, and what details besides! Mme. Massod de Bussens asked nothing of all this; she contented herself with saying:

"I shall call on him. He will understand the harm he has done you. He will repair it, if he loves you a little."

The pretty face of Rose took an air of doubt and some spitefulness.

"I am sure he loves me well," she said. "But—"

She stopped, looking at her protectress, who did not understand her.

"But?"

"I think it would be better not to see him!"

Antoinette exclaimed:

"But, my poor child, you know nothing, then? You understand nothing? What will you do? What will become of your child? What will become of yourself? It is for him to think of that. He must make provision for the future. Why, it is his most elementary duty! I'll see him and explain the matter."

In M. Tiercet's study, a large gray apartment, smelling of dust and old papers, she saw a stubby young fellow, with crafty features and mean-looking eyes, behind tinted glasses, a perfect model of the village gallant,

sensual and boastful. Very much surprised by such a visit, Morand at first was profuse in awkward compliments, then, seeing Antoinette embarrassed and guessing the object of this delicate step on her part, he allowed her time to get confused, to approach the subject in a roundabout fashion, all the while observing her with a cunning eye and a smile that soon became a grin. He did not budge until she hinted at marriage.

"Never, never; catch me at it!"

As she gazed upon him, entirely put out of countenance, he added in a brutal and cynical tone:

"When I marry, I expect to get a fortune with my wife."

Intimidated by his coolness, she objected:

"But you promised to marry her!"

He shrugged his shoulders:

"That does not concern you."

"But still — Rose was a virtuous girl and you have wronged her."

The clerk expanded with vulgar vanity:

"Well, yes. But that is no reason why I should wrong myself."

Indignant and ashamed, and blushing all over, Mme. Massod de Bussens conquered the almost painful disgust with which the fellow's coarseness inspired her, to ask further:

"You will do nothing for her, then? Nothing? Nothing?"

He answered with a scowl:

"Nothing."

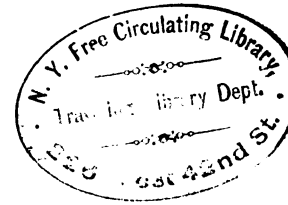
"Well, you are an infamous man! But all is not over yet. I shall speak to M. Tiercet."

Morand interrupted her with tranquil impertinence:

"He is there, madame, in his private room. Shall I announce you?"

In the little room off the study she renewed her story, to which M. Tiercet listened, leaning back in his leather arm-chair with expressionless eyes and impassive face. When she had finished he appeared to reflect for a moment, looked at the ceiling, and at last answered slowly, with pauses between each of his phrases:

"Undoubtedly, madame, it is very sad — very sad, indeed. It is extremely sad. M. Morand has acted badly — oh! very badly. I could not have believed him capable of such — levity! But what can you expect? Young men will be young men, we are told. M. Morand is a good clerk, a very good clerk, indeed; that is the main point, as far as I am concerned; now, is it not? He is ambitious; some day or other he will marry well. In fact, madame, it would please me to be of service to you. But I cannot interfere in this matter. No! really I cannot. And if you will permit a man of my age and experience to give you advice, you will, madame, be wise not to meddle further with this affair. It would be useless in the first place. And, besides, people take such singular notions — your proceedings would be looked upon at least as strange — very strange!"



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CHAPTER XXV

"I will not Love!"

AFTER this rebuke Mme. Massod de Bussens returned sadly to the Tilleuls, a prey to a thousand painful and confused impressions, which she could hardly reduce to shape. But, if Morand's coarseness had seemed odious to her, and M. Tiercet's indifference cowardly and contemptible, the calmness with which Rose heard the result of the step she had just taken astounded her. In her thin little voice, which took a tone of unusual seriousness, she answered:

"I thought you would lose your time, madame. How could a gentleman like M. Morand marry me?"

Brought to a standstill for a moment by such resignation, Antoinette cried with all the energy of her loyal heart:

"But he promised, did he not?"

Seeing the vacant, ambiguous look on her face, she repeated:

"Did he not promise to marry you?"

Her little blonde head made the sign of no.

"No?" exclaimed Antoinette, hesitating to believe her ears. "He did not promise to marry you? Never? And you! you! Oh!—"

She concentrated in this cry all the revolt aroused by the shock given to her ideas on the mystery of love, and she no longer found excuse for her protégée in the leniency of her offended conscience. Rose stammered, with tears in her voice:

"Is it then so wrong?"

"Ah, you unfortunate girl, is it possible you have no principle? Have you no sense of the difference between good and evil?"

Then there were floods of tears, but Antoinette saw that Rose wept without understanding why; wept because she was scolded, like a child who has just done wrong, without having an inkling of the wrong it has done.

When dinner was over and Maurice had returned to school, Mme. Massod de Bussens told her husband how she had employed that morning. He expressed his disapproval in grave terms, with eyes fixed on her sternly, while all the time stirring the sugar in his coffee.

"I was always sure this would end badly. First, a thoughtless action, and afterwards a step that will bring ridicule on us. You will be now talked about everywhere, nor can I blame those who criticise your conduct. How M. Tiercet's clerk will laugh over it with his comrades! What business has an honest woman to concern herself about such matters?"

She listened with bowed head, too much deceived in her illusions to make an effort to defend herself. As for him, he turned the incident to account, according

to his usual custom, in confirming his theories of life. He generalized:

"There are two classes of beings in this world: those who walk straight and those who don't; those who have the good fortune and the merit to be among the former should have nothing in common with the latter. The line of demarcation is clearly traced; it is absurd to forget it. It is a waste of time trying to do a kindness to the undeserving. I have often told you this, but you have a romantic disposition. You accuse me of harshness; I am not harsh, I have experience, that is all; I know mankind. Those who abandon the right road never return to it, and those who mix themselves up with them are always punished in the end."

Alas! facts were justifying his philosophy! Still, Antoinette could not accept it in a resigned spirit; nay, this very wisdom inspired her with a resentful impatience. Never before did there seem to her such a difference between herself and her husband. He interrupted himself to swallow some mouthfuls of coffee. He was heavy, ungraceful, slovenly; his lips on the rim of the cup had an unpleasing distortion. Decidedly, he was growing too fat. His whole person breathed self-assurance. His slightest gesture expressed self-satisfaction. As he was pouring out a glass of cognac, she said to him, in a tone, the irony of which was perfectly lost on him:

"You ought to give up brandy, my dear; it makes you congestive."

He did not deign to give her any attention, emptied the half of the glass, and continued:

"I hope this misadventure will teach you a lesson. Women (he uttered the word with an imperceptible shade of contempt that made Antoinette start) are too obedient to their first impulses. They should always distrust their first impulses—"

The unexpected arrival of M. Leen brought him to a halt. But he was too much preoccupied with the false step taken by his wife to speak of anything else. Perceiving Antoinette's discontented attitude and her air of mute protest, M. Leen judged the situation in a trice. Owing to his high-bred courtesy, he usually listened to his neighbor without contradicting him, well knowing that argument could not reach him. This time, however, he could not resist the temptation of exclaiming:

"Good heavens! my dear friend, you are terribly severe!"

"But just!" replied the other.

As he threw back his head a second time with his lofty air of infallible certainty, his wife cast one resentful glance upon him. M. Leen surprised it on the way, and a slight smile flickered on his lips.

"You think so?" he asked. "But is love so great a crime then?"

This question was a reply to the obscure thoughts that had been for some time agitating the soul of Mme. Massod de Bussens. And so she made a mo-

tion indicating eager attention, while her husband cried out impetuously:

"What! It can be one of the worst — the very worst!"

M. Leen continued:

"In any case, it is the only one that is never pardoned, — the only one for which there is neither indulgence nor compassion. We show more severity towards these poor creatures than we do to thieves, swindlers and cut-throats. We tolerate vulgar debauchery, but not love!"

M. Massod de Bussens exclaimed:

"Oh, indeed!"

"Now, just only look at what is taking place this very moment. Which of the two beings now before the tribunal of public opinion is the better? Assuredly, it is madame's little protégée. Let us suppose that she is guilty. There is much ignorance in her fault, and there is no calculation. Now, could the same be said of M. Morand? He knew perfectly well he was ruining a poor girl, but that did not hinder him; on the contrary, it made him the vainer of his conquest. Yet Rose is the only one of the two to satisfy justice; she is driven out of the asylum, while he preserves the entire esteem of his employer in spite of all. She is condemned to misery or to debauchery; he will have an honorable career, will marry well, and be highly respected. Do you think all this just?"

M. Massod de Bussens, a little embarrassed, extri-

cated himself from the difficulty with a gesture which waved aside all inopportune reflections.

"These are mere subtilities!"

Antoinette at last turned away her eyes from him, while M. Leen replied composedly:

"No, no. It is the scaffolding of your judgments and virtues that is found fragile when examined too near. Are you not of my opinion, madame?"

Antoinette, little in the habit of contradicting her husband, hesitated an instant, then in a tone that was firm and somewhat aggressive, she said:

"Certainly, monsieur; I think just as you do."

M. Massod de Bussens glared at her, at once stupefied and indignant.

"Ah! you are wrong — outrageously wrong!" he shouted. "It is not so! M. Leen is a foreigner, a philosopher. He may have whatever opinions on persons and things suit him, even though of the most subversive character. But we! — we are not free-thinkers; we have a religion which guides and enlightens us — we know that good is good and evil is evil. I do not admit any of those sophisms that serve to confound them. This broadness of view, as it is called to-day, does not please me. What you have just said proves its danger. And as this girl has been the cause of — of our disagreeable discussion, I insist on her being got rid of as speedily as possible: do you understand! My roof was not intended to shelter such creatures."

It would have been as impossible for Antoinette to

intercede for Rose now as to ask pardon for herself, for her whole being was in revolt. Had she then no freedom? Must her will be always annihilated by this despotic will that disdained persuasion and was imposed by brutal force?

"It is well," she said, rising, her entire body quivering. "Rose shall go — she shall not remain another day under your roof, which, as it appears, is not mine, but I warn you, I shall not abandon her. I shall see Mlle. Surgeat, who will take her in, for she is at liberty to do good!"

"No," said M. Massod de Bussens, dryly, "you shall not busy yourself about her any further. I forbid you!"

At this moment M. Leen intervened with a conciliatory intention.

"If this girl troubles you," he said to them, "I will take her in myself; there is room and my old housekeeper will see after her."

There was a moment's hesitation; too much accustomed to give way to resist longer, Antoinette accepted and thanked him by a sign, while M. Massod de Bussens, not finding any way of rejecting the compromise, grumbled: "There are, however, hospitals, homes, places of every kind, where such people are received, where they rot together. What else were charitable institutions intended for?"

Left alone, Antoinette had a long fit of musing. All that was passing for some days around her and within

her, the dim suggestions she was beginning to have a glimpse of, the dull echoes aroused by the incidents relating to Rose, the latent spirit of opposition excited by the language of her husband, by his gestures and manner, and encouraged by the words of M. Leen, all this was carrying her so far beyond her ordinary mental habits! Until now, one rule had pressed on her life, a rule she never dreamed of discussing, which she accepted as if emanating from some unseen power, which dispensed with the necessity of reflecting and doubting, and now this rule was being lifted from her as by an invisible hand. But Mme. Massod de Bussens was not a creature of instinct, ready to follow sudden and, perhaps, fugitive impulses. Between herself and her feelings there was still the hedge of her profoundest beliefs, of her long-acquired ideas, planted and rooted in the good soil her nature afforded them. What reflections, reasonings, circumstances, what struggles must she have encountered, then, to make her think, not, indeed, of leaping over the barrier, but to make her think she should even be tempted to leap over it! And yet, during the conversation terminated by M. Leen's departure, there was not a single moment when Trembloz was not in her thoughts. His image, always present, took definite shape now; and suddenly Antoinette heard this avowal gushing up from the very fountain of her being:

"I love!"

It was like a keen joy quickly followed and extinguished by a dull pain. All the divine promises of the

word stood revealed to her soul, while, at the same time, enlightened by her habitual lucidity and preserved by her natural uprightness from romantic sophistry, she grasped all its dangers. If love, with its ordinary wiles, appeared to her as an innocent and charming dream, it was an illusion which lasted hardly some seconds, for, in a trice, she saw its peril, she measured its dissolving force, she had a foretaste of its fatal exigencies. Then, stiffening all her energies, she cried out in her heart:

"I will not love!"

CHAPTER XXVI

"I Believe I Detest Him!"

BANISHING the reverie that was undermining her will, she attended to such household matters as came within her reach, making preparations for Rose's dismissal, giving orders to her servants, looking over the linen, and finally seeing to the dusting of her husband's library by the chambermaid.

She was occupied with these laborious details when Maurice returned, with blood-stained face. His comrades had been beating him. All out of breath from his hard running down the road, sobbing violently, he was coming to relieve his impotent anger, his wrathful humiliation, on his mother's bosom. She wiped his cheeks, caressed and pitied him.

"Where are you hurt?" she asked, disquieted by the gasping and nervous sobs.

With his little fists clenched, he answered: "They — all — three — took part — against me. Yes, — three of them! Quartier — held my — hands. The others — slapped — and scratched! I bit them! But they'll see! They'll see! I shan't always be the weakest, and then! ah, then!"

Little by little she succeeded in calming him by tender words. He cried gently in her arms, as if he was quite a small child; then his tears stopped, he let her bathe his eyes, and changed his clothes, repeating still: "They'll see! Ah, when I'm big! when I'm big!"

"Poor little fellow!" she thought, "when you are big you will bleed from other wounds, other blows will bruise you, and your mother will no longer be able to wipe the tears from your eyes or rock you in her lap!"

When M. Massod de Bussens returned, there was another scene. The sight of the condition of his son's face made him the angrier because he was already in ill-humor. He demanded an explanation, and refused to believe the one Maurice gave him in a voice which fear rendered hesitating.

"You are not telling me the truth!" he exclaimed. "It was you who began, I am sure of it!"

The child protested with all the vehemence of his outraged faith.

"Oh, no! papa, it was not I, I assure you!"

"I say it was! People are not beaten without reason. You provoked them, and got the thrashing you deserved. I am glad of it!"

Maurice did not dare to reply; with his head sunk on his breast, he was biting his fist, while his breast swelled with fresh sobs, which for nothing in the world would he let escape under the eye of his father.

"Why should you not believe him, my dear?" asked

Antoinette, lowering her voice. "You know well he is not a liar."

But M. Massod de Bussens repulsed her almost brutally:

"I know nothing of the sort! Pray, do not try to take his part, as you are always doing when he is wrong."

Whereupon he left the room, and the child threw himself upon his mother, with eyes of despair. She embraced him anew, consoled him, and fearing his father's return, she repeated:

"Do not cry, Maurice, I beseech you! Do not cry!"

Although ripe for another outburst, he succeeded in driving back the tears.

"It is unjust," he said, faintly. "I have told the truth, and papa won't believe me! He is always scolding me! He is unkind to me; unkinder than Quartier! But you love me, mamma, do you not? And you believe me, don't you?"

She covered him with kisses.

"Yes, I believe you, my dear, dear, little child. And — love you! Oh! I love you with all my strength!"

At the same time her rancor toward the tyrant whose despotism weighed on both their lives became more intense. Her heart was overflowing with love for the tender, persecuted boy, who found consolation nowhere but with her. She was saying to herself:

"I have my son! I have only him — nothing but him!"

The supper was very unpleasant. As on every evening, it began with the short prayer which M. Massod de Bussens never failed to repeat, with his eyes fixed on the plate, before eating. Never before had Antoinette grown impatient of this devotional routine; now, for the first time, it annoyed her. Never before, either, had she noticed that her husband ate his soup noisily, blowing on the spoon with his lips, in a way that disgusted her. In the silence they observed towards each other she had leisure for observing several disagreeable habits that distinguished him. For instance, between the services, he gave little regular taps on the border of his plate that were exasperating.

He was not troubled, either, about his wife or son, but was staring into vacancy with an expression of superiority and indifference that set her teeth on edge, as if he was the only one present worthy of the slightest consideration. He selected the choicest morsels, without the slightest scruple, and, although the dishes at every meal were contrived in accordance with his known tastes, he was always finding fault.

"What will he complain of to-day?" she asked herself, after she had made sure that the cook did not deserve any reproach. She added, resentfully, in her own mind:

"He is sure to find something to blame!"

And, in fact, he did complain of the roast beef, which was not well done enough.

"Look here!" he said, pointing to the blood drip-

ping on the dish as he carved; "and yet you know well I detest meat that is too rare!"

She answered in a tone that was slightly aggressive:

"You are wrong; nothing is so healthy as roast beef rare."

With his fork in the air, he glared at her, dumfounded by what looked like the beginning of a rebellion, for she had never before ventured to discuss any of his observations. At last he growled:

"You know I can't endure it. I shall not eat it!"

He pushed the plate away from him with an abrupt gesture.

"And this is the kind of affection he shows me!" thought Antoinette.

Not yet recovered from his emotion of the afternoon, Maurice was nervous and absent-minded. While pouring out some water he handled the decanter awkwardly, and broke a glass.

"You clumsy fool!" shouted M. Massod de Bussens, at once. "You do not know how to behave yourself at table! Begone! Go to bed!"

With heart bursting and pale with emotion, the boy rose without protest and went and kissed his mother. She held him a moment pressed to her bosom, quite as much agitated as he was, and wearied out from bending under the despotism that curbed them both.

"I don't see that he has committed a crime!" she observed when Maurice had left.

In his driest and most disagreeable tone M. Massod de Bussens replied:

"No; he did right to break the glass. He might turn the whole house upside down for all you would care!"

She answered, elevating her voice a little:

"But you are always finding fault with him; always scolding him whether right or wrong."

"You will tell me next that I am a cruel tyrant."

"The dread he has of you is horrible. He hardly dares to breathe in your presence. He, who is so open-hearted, so affectionate, actually becomes frozen when he sees you, as if he had something to hide."

M. Massod de Bussens sneered: "A tyrant, a barbarous tyrant, am I? A real tyrant!"

She retorted sharply:

"At any rate, a despot!"

Cutting the air before him with an imperious gesture, he said in a tone that admitted of no reply:

"I am what I am — and have reason to be so!"

And they finished their repast without further words, in a menacing silence, both astonished, she at her courage, he at her audacity; both farther away from each other than ever, as if the antagonisms so long endured with the resignation of custom, the rancors amassed by a life in common, the misunderstandings latent for so many years, had on a sudden burst forth under some occult influence, like a mine sprung by an unknown hand.

M. Massod de Bussens was the first to rise from the table. He turned away with an offended air, without

looking at his wife, as if to crush her with his indifference and disdain. She gazed after him; when he had closed the door behind him she shrugged her shoulders, murmuring:

"I believe I detest him!"

But without dwelling on this evil thought she went up to her son's room.

Although he did not like going to bed early, Maurice had at once obeyed the order he received. With his elbow on his pillow, his large eyes opened to their widest, and his face bathed in tears, he was pursuing a long train of serious reflections, for, as soon as his mother entered, he shouted:

"Papa is unjust! Papa is unjust! Papa does not love me!"

Antoinette embraced him and did not contradict him. Was not this complaint an answer to her own? No, he did not love his son, he did not love his wife; he loved nobody but himself, his own comfort, his own ease, his own authority, he knew nothing, nothing, nothing of love!

"But I love you!" she said, arranging his pillows.

This word, falling from her lips, filled his soul with sweetness.

"Oh! yes, mamma, I know it," answered Maurice. "Oh! yes, yes!"

He covered her hand with kisses, he pressed her with all his strength against his quivering little body, shaken with sobs.

"We love each, we two! Only we two! we two!"

As she bent over him, he rubbed his head against her with the movements of a little dog, caressing and obedient. In this way a few moments passed, full of tenderness; then the child, tired out, at last fell asleep in his mother's arms, who listened for some seconds to the sound of his light breathing, carefully unwound her arms from around him and went out on tiptoe.

She had hardly left him, when she was pierced through by a keen sensation of loneliness and despair; her child was resting, separated from her by a long night, by the depth and purity of his slumbers; she was therefore alone, alone in the house, where the faces she met could only be indifferent or hostile, alone in the country amid the gathering silence, alone in the world. None to hear the beatings of her heart, none to answer them! No ear to open to her confidences, no look to seek hers fondly, no voice to caress her with sympathy and affection. Whatever might be her feelings and hopes and joys and sorrows, she had to keep them for herself alone; her inward life was a closed sanctuary about which no one was concerned, which she herself was hardly acquainted with, where certain virgin recesses called her by the charm of their mystery. It had been thus ever since her childhood, as far as her memory went back; all the linked years whose chain formed her life, she had lived alone, unknown to those who were near her, and unknown to herself also. The future years would unroll

like the others, would vanish in monotony, would give equal promise of oblivion.

As a rule Antoinette spent her evenings with her husband, who, while she kept her eyes bent over some work, smoked his pipe and read the journals, unless he desired to carry on a conversation and entertain her with his composts or with the affairs of the town. The idea of seeing, hearing, enduring him, after what had just occurred between them, was intolerable to her. She threw a shawl about her shoulders and passed into the garden.

CHAPTER XXVII

"Peace in the Church"

THE evening, although a little cool, was fine, the stars were already lit in a pure, moonless sky. At the horizon the Jura outlined itself in black forms on the growing darkness. On a bench, within the porch, M. Massod de Bussens was smoking his pipe. Although discontented, he had not, however, any intention of keeping up his anger, for he attached too little importance to the words of his wife to be offended by them beyond measure. When she was going by him, he asked her without looking up:

"Are you coming in, Antoinette?"

"No."

"Where are you going?"

"For a walk."

"You'll catch cold."

"I am not cold, monsieur."

To avoid further conversation she went on, in among the flower beds, from which the perfume of the flowers was mounting. The air and motion were doing her good; why not continue her walk? She passed into the yard, called Nestor, who began frisking about her,

crossed the garden again, followed, mechanically, the lilac alley, and found herself in the little wood. The damp shadows and the silence enfolded her. Although a shiver of delicious fear caressed her, she continued walking on, under the beeches in which the wind was murmuring. Soon, without suspecting that she had travelled so far, she found herself before the White Rocks.

The two boulders rose up, all pale, their fantastic forms taking on a mysterious aspect in the darkness, like two real statues that, though worn away by the ages, yet still keep the humanity they once possessed. Antoinette paused to contemplate them; the memory of the legend came to her as an appeal blended of all the confused and dead voices which, in all times, in all languages, have sung of sorrow and of love. But Nestor, who was running some steps in advance, barked. She saw another form rise behind the rocks, a living form this one. Although choking with genuine terror, she was able to call back her dog, and remained rooted to the ground: she had just recognized Trembloz, or guessed that it was he.

A cry escaped her.

"You? You here?"

He drew near her slowly, without answering, and yet for a moment they heard, in the silence, all that was passing within them. Then, one single idea issued from the confusion that mastered both: they wished to justify their presence, to explain their meeting. She said, in a

voice the energy of which was scarcely repressed by her emotion:

"I often take a stroll in the evening with Nestor."

And he:

"I thought I would go out for a moment this evening; chance drew me hither."

She continued:

"I was afraid when I saw some one there!"

They remained three paces from each other, listening to their own breathing, the only sound heard in the silence.

Very gently Trembloz asked:

"You are no longer afraid, now?"

She could hardly stand. She stammered:

"No — seeing that — it was you. But, all the same — I — I shall never return again!"

As if some inward force was making his words gush out in spite of him, he broke forth hoarsely and like one who was wandering in his mind:

"I knew — you would come here — I was sure."

She covered her face with her hands.

"Be silent!"

He took a step towards her.

"Yes, I knew — My God! I didn't want to come! But I am alone. No one loves me. The world is a desert around me. And now I love you!"

She repeated, in a voice hoarser even than his:

"Be silent!"

He continued:

"Yes, I will be silent. What is the good of anything further, now! You know — you know."

She turned away. He stretched out his hands to her without approaching any nearer.

"Do not fly from me! Pardon me! Oh! I beseech you, do not be angry! What have you to fear? I have no thought of evil. Let me only think of you. Stay! I will never again return to the Tilleuls, if you desire it! I wish only to see you, with the rest, sometimes —"

She interrupted him:

"Do not say any more, I beg of you! We must never see each other again! Never! Farewell!"

She turned away hastily. He saw her dark form disappear behind the trees. For a moment yet, he listened to her light footsteps flying along the path. Then he sank down in a heap, stifling the cry that swelled his breast, at the foot of the Rocks, dumb and cold, whatever the nature of the secret they might be keeping.

However violent the nature of a great moral crisis may be, there will be periods of lucid energy in it during which the conscience and the will are in harmony. It was so with Mme. Massod de Bussens; after a night filled with frenzied visions, she recovered her habitual equilibrium for a time, saw clearly into herself and adopted a series of resolutions. Above all, Rose must be dismissed from the asylum she had given her, and that without any further delay; the presence in her home of this weak and guilty child was actually help-

ing the agitation which she was resolved on mastering. Then, if she wished to banish dangerous reveries, to resist the suggestions which idleness gives birth to in a troubled heart, she must widen the sphere of her activity, no matter how; the mistress of a household can always find enough around her to occupy her mind and keep her days employed. For some time she would not go into town, would give up visiting, shopping and the Sunday sermon. Nothing would be easier, if her absence was remarked — and it was sure to be — than to pretend some indisposition. Besides, this would not last forever. Antoinette knew that she was strong; searching out the cause of her momentary weakness, she told herself that she had not been sufficiently on her guard; now that her conscience was on the alert, there was no longer any danger. Her heart would soon grow calm in the peacefulness of her ordinary occupations; a salutary self-restraint would restore her the full possession of herself; when she had regained the habitual control of her emotions, she would enter anew on the current of her life, and, set free from all romantic thoughts, she could see him again; could listen to him and invite him to her table. He would no longer inspire any fear, and would become simply a very dear friend. Why not? He was younger than she; she would treat him as an elder sister might, with something of maternal tenderness added. Who could hinder her later on from looking after his future? Why should she not seek a wife for him, some one capable

of giving him the happiness he deserved, some woman who would become her dearest friend, whom she might advise and confide in?

In spite of her fatigue, Antoinette rose early and breakfasted with her husband. She was entirely composed, but her composure was more successful in restraining her emotions than in hiding them. As Maurice did not come down she began to grow anxious.

"Pshaw!" said M. Massod de Bussens, "lazy, as usual."

But a servant came in to announce that the child had a fever and was coughing. Immediately she arose from the table, and could not help casting a reproachful glance at the father.

"Can't you see?" she said. "Maurice is very sensitive. You might have spared him a little."

"I scold him when he deserves it; what I said did not give him a cold in the head."

She spent a part of the morning in nursing her son, and when it was nearly ten, decided to call in Dr. Mathorel. Meanwhile, she had the conversation with Rose which she had thought it necessary to enter on the evening before. It was a source of fresh emotions. The poor girl had been seized with a kind of ardent and blind devotion for her benefactress. She was overwhelmed with grief; she burst into tears, embraced Antoinette's knees, and grovelled at her feet with a passion of which her childish being seemed incapable. She repeated:

"Oh! keep me! keep me!"

A few days ago, such an exhibition of violent feeling would have had but little effect on the reserved and well-balanced character of Mme. Massod de Bussens; now she was altogether upset by it. Instead of leaving Rose to herself, she set about calming her with caresses and affectionate words. Then she tried to reason with her. She explained that her present condition rendered her stay at the Tilleuls impossible any longer; she promised she would never abandon her, would think of her and see her often. But the child repeated:

"A few days more. Only a few days more. Three days, madame, only three days! I will be so quiet that no one will perceive that I am in the house."

Antoinette was moved, and it ended in her granting the respite prayed for. But she did not do so without misgiving. The very indulgence appeared to her to hide a danger, and the pain the exercise of her severity caused her made her distrust her own firmness.

Dr. Mathorel came towards the afternoon. He made a thorough examination of Maurice with the stethoscope, to which the boy submitted with docility, reassured the mother, and wrote his prescription. As he was leaving, he met M. Massod de Bussens, who invited him to remain for dinner. The doctor made some excuses, but he was eager to accept, and did so, after a little pressure on the part of his host. This was his first invitation to the Tilleuls, and although he affected a very radical demeanor and spoke with contempt of "the aristocrats,"

when occasion offered, he was not indifferent to the satisfaction of being able to say at his club in the evening: "I dined to-day with the Massods de Bussens." He knew this would create a sensation, and he felt quite elated by the fact, while not at all willing to confess as much to himself.

For the last few days Antoinette had sought for solitude and silence. Having become aware of her peril, she was happy in the feeling that she was now saved from it, as well as at her success in avoiding an interview with her husband. Dr. Mathorel had the reputation of being a fine conversationalist. To listen to him would, in any case, be a distraction. He was, in fact, a very fluent talker. As soon as the soup appeared he entered on a long political discussion with his host with regard to the referendum, at this time a question entirely new. It was to be submitted to the popular vote on the following Sunday. M. Massod de Bussens was, by tradition, personal tastes and character, a partisan of the old condition of things and hated popular institutions. Mathorel defended them as a democrat accustomed to good society who, without putting his flag in his pocket, knows, however, the respect due to the opinions of an adversary. Then they passed to the affairs of the town, criticised the administration of the syndic Quartier, whom they agreed in considering, nevertheless, a more capable man than his rival, the hatter Rabourin.

"Let every one keep to his trade, and the cows will be well tended!" said M. Massod de Bussens, who was fond of old sayings.

Suddenly the doctor changed the subject, asking:

"By the way, have you heard the rumor that is running about our pastor?"

Antoinette felt her heart stop beating. However, her face did not betray any sign of confusion, as she answered:

"No; what is it, pray?"

While M. Massod de Bussens waited with his fork in the air, Mathorel began:

"Well, they say—"

He broke off:

"Oh! it's mere gossip, you understand. You know everything that's said here isn't exactly the truth. To make a long story short, would you guess whom our worthy pastor is paying his addresses to?"

He looked from one to the other with the air of a man who is the possessor of a rather startling piece of news, the value of which he desires to have others appreciate.

Antoinette, after a successful effort at self-control, asked:

"How can you expect us to guess anything about the matter?"

"Oh! you would never guess! No one would ever guess, except, of course, public rumor, which is never backward in guessing, and public rumor affirms that M. Trembloz is paying his addresses to the daughter of his dear colleague!"

"Oh!" protested Antoinette, in a loud voice, "that is impossible!"

Her husband, looking at her with the air of a man whom nothing astounds any longer, said:

"Would you tell me why?"

She saw she had to explain, and, her ideas growing confused, she sought for the proper words.

"Why? Because — Oh, you understand! This young girl — as every one knows — isn't in a — normal condition — You will never make me believe — a man like M. Trembloz — could — through self-interest —"

As she seemed to find a difficulty in finishing the phrase, Dr. Mathorel, with an air of good-natured perspicacity, continued:

"Yes, yes, you are quite right, the little one is not much troubled with brains, and she certainly does not make up for the defect by beauty! But then, consider. What is your great orator, after all? He is the son of peasants; he is utterly without fortune and must find the shoe pinch him often enough. He must marry some time or other, surely, and why not Mlle. Sordes as well as another? She is his near neighbor, just as if the thing was designed. And then the very difficulty in finding her a husband would induce the father to make a sacrifice to have her settled. A fine dowry and good family on one side, an eloquent young man with a great future before him on the other. The arrangement isn't so bad after all!"

M. Massod de Bussens approved.

"I see nothing objectionable in it."

"And a good thing for us, too!" added Mathorel. "Peace in the church; no more quarrels between the parsons! That will be a change in our communal life, won't it?"

He burst out laughing, but on perceiving that no one joined him, he bit his lips. M. Massod de Bussens did not like jesting on serious things. As to Antoinette, she could not refrain from uttering another protest.

"No, no; M. Trembloz is not the kind of man — to make such calculations!"

"In this world every one calculates a little," said M. Massod de Bussens.

And the doctor:

"Naturally! He has great talent, no one could think of denying it, and, I believe, much elevation of soul. But we must live! Besides, to marry well is not a crime! And then, however disinterested he may be, and I am very much inclined to fancy he is, he has a mother — "

He made an expressive gesture.

"A mother who is quite capable of making her own calculations, I can assure you!"

They looked at him; he at once entered on a detailed account of the characteristics of Mme. Trembloz, who was now an object of curiosity to the entire town, without the inhabitants of the Tilleuls having any notion that such was the case. He described her extraordinary hats, her bonnets, her aprons; he recounted her quarrels

with the tradespeople, the despotism she exercised over her son, her rapacity, her ambition; and all in a tone of exaggeration and caricature, until an unexpected conclusion drawn from his statements by M. Massod de Bussens disconcerted him.

"What inference do you deduce from this, monsieur?"

"I? Oh, none."

"Well, mine is that everything is going from bad to worse, since all professions are now thrown open to every one, it does not matter whom!"

Dismayed at supplying the spirit of reaction with arguments in direct opposition to his principles, he protested:

"No, no, monsieur, that is not what I meant at all," and he changed the conversation again.

CHAPTER XXVIII

"If ever I Marry it will be for Love!"

NOTHING ever escapes the penetration of the dwellers in a small town; they are always on the watch, always restless and malevolent, always ready to embellish the thinnest themes with ample variations. And so it was that expert eyes had already gauged accurately the projects, still somewhat vague, that were ripening in the heart of Mme. Trembloz. She had confided them to nobody, but they were now topics of discussion in the street, the market, the clubs and shops. And so it was, also, that, carried to the Tilleuls by Dr. Mathorel, they became the source of fresh trouble to the poor soul of Mme. Massod de Bussens, whom an effort of energy had restored to serenity, but who after a few hours' respite, found herself now more anxious and disturbed than ever.

Moreover, these rumors were not without some foundation. Mme. Trembloz was continuing her siege, with the more obstinacy, that the demeanor of her son at present was beginning to alarm her more and more. She could not have a suspicion of the drama of which his soul was the theatre, for we seldom lend to others

sentiments we are incapable of experiencing ourselves; but, seeing him nervous, distracted, downcast or irritable, she was trying to find out the meaning of a condition which could not fail to have unpleasant consequences if it lasted, and she conceived that there was no better way of putting an end to it than entire change in his mode of existence. One day, at dinner, he appeared to her so languid and exhausted that for the first time she began to think his health was seriously affected. She was reassured, however, on noticing that on two or three occasions he checked with an effort the course of a tear that shone in his eyes. If he wept, it must be from "another of his fanciful notions," and therefore, the thing was not serious. Still, it was with some gentleness that she inquired:

"What ails you, Henri? Are you ill?" It was a question she had been lately repeating every moment, and which he always evaded answering.

This morning he felt as if he could not endure any more, overwhelmed, as he was, by that despair which could only be relieved by making some one the confidante of his agony. Ah! if he was only able to open his heart to his mother! If he could have found in her a compassionate friend, whose pity might comfort him! But no, he felt more lonely in her presence than when he was in utter solitude. Their language was not the same. Although he sprang from her womb and drank at her breast, they were more unlike than beings of a different race. The words of Christ came to his mind:

"Woman, what is there common between thee and me?" No, his mother could not give him any comfort on his Calvary. He answered then, but in a tone rendered more than usually affectionate by his emotions:

"I am not ill; I do not feel hungry; that is all that is the matter with me."

She looked on him with an air of doubt.

"Do not tell me that! It is your answer always," she returned. "But I can easily see that something or other is the matter with you. Something troubles you — some care — or sorrow — surely something!"

He shrugged his shoulders and tried to smile.

"What do you imagine should ail me?"

"I do not know. How should I? You never had much confidence in your mother. Perhaps you feel tired out with all these changes."

He grasped eagerly at the explanation.

"Yes, that's it; simply tired out. You see one does not change all his habits without feeling the effect of it, is not that so?"

"But I am never tired!"

There was a silence which she did not allow to last long.

"You are not contented here, then?" she resumed.

"Here?"

"Yes, in Bielle."

"Why should I not be as well contented here as in the Vallée — or anywhere else?"

"I have no doubt you will like this place before long. They are all so fond of you already."

He was so entirely possessed by one single idea that he felt suddenly alarmed by the words, as if they indicated a suspicion. The anxious look in his eyes seemed to call for an explanation. She continued:

"Yes, they are well pleased with you. Your sermons have had a great success. Oh, far greater than you think! People say you speak well; very well, indeed. You can see for yourself, then, you have no reason to be disappointed in that respect. Surely, if ever a man was contented you ought to be, instead of pulling a long face, as if some great misfortune had happened to you! But I know, I know, as usual, you have taken some vagary into your head. You were always like that. Why, when you were only a child, you —"

He interrupted her:

"Oh, for goodness' sake, mother, let us not discuss the past!"

She did not persist.

"Oh! I only wanted to say that you are very wrong in bothering yourself about nothing. What's the good of it? Tell me. Now that you are a man! But luckily, all that shall pass away when you are well settled. Do you ever give a thought to that?"

The conversation was beginning to bore him. "Settled?" he began, with great impatience. "Why, I am settled. We are settled here for ten years, for twenty; for all our lives, very likely!"

She became insinuating: "You know well, now, that is not what I mean. I mean when you are married."

He cried out: "Ah! I have no thought of marriage. Let us have done with this!"

He at once regretted the energy he had put into this cry, which had sprung from the depths of his grief, and was half a revelation. But the old woman saw nothing in it out of the usual order.

"You are wrong," she said; "now is the time to think of it."

She shut one eye with a cunning air: "There is no one, then, you have taken a fancy to here? No young girl among those you see at church?"

"I never look at them."

"You're sure? Well, you're a rather strange kind of young man."

She gave a little laugh.

"And I sometimes had a fancy that perhaps you were in love. No? So much the better, then! A man is freer when he has no one in his thoughts."

She pushed back her plate, and, leaning her elbow on the table, said in a graver tone:

"Look here, now; it is time for us to talk to each other seriously, is it not? It is clearly necessary for you to get married. You are gloomy, you are tired of yourself and of everything else, and God only knows what black thoughts have got hold of your brain. All this comes from your living alone."

"I am not alone, mother. Are you not always with me?"

"Oh, I am nothing! Not that I have anything to reproach you with. You have always been a good son, and you love me well. But I am only a peasant. And then, it isn't that only. You are not as comfortable as you might be, you see! The pay of pastors is nothing to brag of. One makes sacrifices for their education, and sends them to college and the university and Germany and God knows where, and when all is done with, the government don't give them enough to live on! Now, don't you see you must marry?"

He smiled disdainfully: "For money?"

"Now that's not what I meant at all. No, but to have a pleasant home, to have a better place in society, one requires to be married. Isn't that true? Your life will be quite different when you marry a girl of good family, far more comfortable in every way. And there is an opportunity. I have spoken of it already!"

"Mlle. Sordes? Ah! come now, mother, you do not think of that!"

"Yes, yes! I know well what you are going to say. Oh yes! — and I know what I know also. I know all about it! But did I ever give you bad advice? She is not very pretty, it is true enough. She may be a little weak in the upper story, although I know her to have a great deal more sense than any one imagines. But she is a good girl, much better than some who have more cleverness."

As Henri did not answer, she hurried on with all her arguments.

"And then the Sordes are so well thought of, so influential in the town! I do not speak of their fortune, since you don't care about it; did you know that they own two houses in the main street? Instead of having all those wretched quarrels that made your predecessors so miserable, you would have the support of M. Sordes in every difficulty. Did you notice how polite he always is to us, though he passes for one of the surliest people in the place?"

"I am well able to protect myself. I do not need to marry his daughter in order to be protected from him."

"But she loves you! You do not know how she loves you! Why, she fainted away the other day at the mere sound of your voice! Oh! you would have a nice wife, yes, a nice wife, tender and gentle. It was only the other day the servant told me—"

He interrupted her dryly:

"I thought I begged you, mother, not to gossip with their servants."

She was a little taken aback, but excused herself:

"Yes, yes, that's true. But—well, I wanted to know. And when important things are at stake, faith, one can't be so very particular. Look here now, if I were you, I would think the matter over. For certain, it is not a resolution to be taken lightly. I would think it over then, and—I would come to a decision in the end."

"Have no fear, I shall not come here again."

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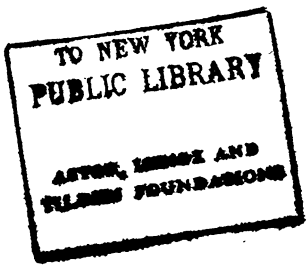
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As he had a far-away look and did not answer, she was hoping that perhaps he was entering into her views. But after a silence he turned his eyes on her and said in a resolute tone, rising from the table:

"Do not speak to me on this subject again, mother, please. I do not wish even to think of it. If I ever marry a woman it shall be one whom I can love. Moreover, you may rest assured that at the present moment I have not the least idea of marrying at all!"

Ah! surely he told no falsehood in this! He was vowed, vowed wholly and forever, to the memory of his inaccessible dream. Furthermore, if the idea of abandoning it had not seemed to him unendurable, if he had not repelled such a thought as a treason, the plans of his mother would not have ruffled his temper; what difference, in fact, did it make whom she proposed for his wife? Whether this one or that one, it was all the same! Nay, for that matter, had not this poor girl, simple, plain and loving, a greater claim on his regard than others? He might fondle her as he would a sickly child, and thus appease the longing for self-sacrifice he felt within him, indifferent to all that gives value to a life in common. If the sacrifice appeared to him too heavy, it was not because of the imperfection of the being to whom he was asked to offer it. No; a certain measure of complacency was mingled with his sorrow, and he was not averse to cultivating it. It did not displease him to probe his wound, now that he dreaded nothing from it. Believing himself the victor, he no

longer made any attempts to master the melancholy that was gradually engrossing him; it invaded him, made him feel more and more weary, and yet he loved it, like those patients who are disturbed at the thought of getting well, who would not wish to be cured; it inspired him with a continued longing for isolation, a longing so tyrannical that the commonplace of life became unendurable; it sufficed him, so that he avoided every distraction as a sharper evil the stings of which might interfere with these beloved pangs. His visits to the poor alone brought some diversion by awakening his pity; he liked to rock his own sorrows to the lullaby of the consoling words he repeated by the bedside of the sick; and the hopes of a world beyond with which he lit up the mirages of this life before the eyes of the disinherited feebly assuaged his thirst for happiness. But he neglected his other duties, his committees, boards, those meetings that brought him in contact with men, when he was required to discuss practical interests no longer capable of fixing his thoughts. He would say to his mother:

"There is a meeting of the School Board to-day; I must go to it."

But he never went. He shut himself up in his study. How often and how aimlessly he paced round the little table on which the books lay unopened! In the evening he made the want of a little exercise the pretext for going out. Then, in the dark, cold night, in the silence of the sleeping country, he again and again followed the

same path, passed by the closed gate of the Tilleuls, where he was sometimes saluted by the barking of Nestor, went around the grounds, plunged into the young beeches of the Bois-Joli, and found himself at last at the White Rocks, where she had bade him farewell. And while he contemplated these huge masses, resembling grave-stones to which some ignorant sculptor had given a vague human form, and infinitely peaceful in their solitude, a wish which he tried to banish stirred his soul.

"Will she nevermore return?"

She returned.

As before, she approached without seeing him. When she perceived him she stifled the cry of anguish that was bursting from her heart, and, altogether overcome, leaned against one of the rocks. His hands were joined in a gesture of prayer. For a moment they remained thus, both silent.

"Have no fear," he said at last. "I shall not come here again."

And he went hastily away without looking back, so that he did not hear a sob rending the darkness behind him.

CHAPTER XXIX

"The Power of Sin is the Law"

THE nocturnal rambles of Trembloz did not escape the attention of the Biellians, whose interest in their pastor had not yet had time to get dull. Without precisely finding fault with them, they yet thought them queer, to say the least of it. Beyond all doubt an honest man has a right to walk during the night as well as during the day, if that is to his taste, but surely a pastor could find a better way of spending his evenings than in moonlight musings that do not square with either his years or position. When it became known that the regular goal of all his excursions was the White Rocks, the surprise increased — what could he be doing near these stones, concerning which legend, although fully known to very few in town, still awoke ideas of illicit love and guilty assignations? Then, one day, as the White Rocks were close by the Tilleuls, the name of Mme. Massod de Bussens chanced to be brought in connection with that of Trembloz; nobody had had wind of their meetings; none had been able to read their hearts; they were now brought together nevertheless, perhaps by instinct, perhaps by malice. More-

over, the external demeanor of the young wife was calculated to give some color to these vague suspicions, which condensed little by little; her singular attitude toward Rose was recalled; her eagerness in adopting the indulgent views of the young pastor; her house thrown open to the young girl, now living with the Leens, whose free and easy opinions on certain subjects had already furnished ample matter for comment.

The retired life she had been leading for some time drew forth remark, for her carriage, which people had got into the habit of looking for at certain intervals, driving along the irregular streets with its old horses and its old coachman, no longer put in an appearance. She was seen at church no more, where for years she had shown herself Sunday after Sunday, seated on her reserved bench, respected as a châtelaine of other days. There was a rumor that she was ill; some persons who went to see her returned with the disquieting information that this was but too true. Mme. Tiercet found her very pale, with circles about her eyes.

"And so sad!" said Mme. Quartier. "You can have no idea of her sadness!"

"Has she seen a doctor?"

"No."

"Then her illness is not physical. What is the matter, I wonder? What can be the matter?"

When, by a natural gradation, they had got the length of attributing her sadness and retirement to her probable sentiments for Trembloz, there was at first more of

merriment than malice in the remarks to which the news gave rise. In those little centres, where great passions are rare, stifled as they are in their birth by the pettiness of the interests that engross the attention of all, by the narrow bounds within which life is confined, by the terror of Mrs. Grundy, by the certainty of discovery — in a word, by all that holds the place of virtue — men and women talk of such things without entirely believing them, and smile before they condemn.

"Has M. Massod de Bussens any suspicions?" it was asked.

Some one answered:

"Perhaps."

A voice continued:

"He must feel very much put out."

But another at once added:

"Bah! he'll soon settle the affair."

There was a little more anxiety manifested when the discussion passed from the Tilleuls to the parsonage; for the conduct of Trembloz gave many openings to criticism, and he was held to a strict account for his negligence.

"The only thing he seems to attend to is his sermons. He gives his other duties the go-by."

"You're not far wrong there. He has missed three sessions of the School Board one after the other."

"You never come across him."

"Except in the evening."

"On the road to the Tilleuls."

"Decidedly. All this is not quite natural."

"What is going to happen?"

"Wait and see!"

And they were waiting, with eyes on the watch, with ears open, some ironical and careless, others, and they were the better minded, disquieted and anxious, having a sort of presentiment that something was threatening the moral security of the town.

An incident came soon to heighten this uneasiness.

In a conscience so exercised as was that of Trembloz, an illicit sentiment, even when combated and reprobated, must of necessity give rise to a whole crop of dangerous ideas, the growth of which at last shakes the very foundations of the moral faith, menaces the certitude that has been so laboriously acquired, and thus attacks the very springs of the will. In fact, the unhappy man was struggling against himself. The greater the energy he displayed in this silent contest, of which he alone was the hero and the victim, the more did he see the props on which he rested stagger beneath him. He drove from his heart the sentiment that filled him with tenderness, devotion and piety, that made him find his life higher and God better. And now, at the very moment his wound was still bleeding, his bruised soul was haunted by many a perilous "Why?" Why should the love that exalts and ennobles be evil, when the good is so monotonous, so mediocre and so flat? Why should the poor souls that would wish to free themselves from the bonds by which they are oppressed be reduced to

groan without hope, like prisoners in chains? Why should the sacrifice which he had just accomplished, instead of filling his mind with joy, as every act of virtue ought, have left in its wake only a disgust with himself that almost resembled a remorse? Why is the world regulated by unjust laws only, laws whose injustice is self-evident, and why should these miserable laws have received the divine sanction? Doubt and revolt, those two enemies, long since vanquished by his reason, crushed by his will, were thus returning to prowl around him with stronger arms than ever. Now that his heart had become their accomplice, he was listening to the voices he had once repelled, the arguments he had refuted, the suggestions he had stifled. His own reflections turned against him, in order to weaken him the more. The very words of the sacred book, in which he vainly sought for comfort, could not give him strength; for he was beginning to discover in them ambiguous meanings, and perhaps the bolder interpretation was, after all, the true one. At least, it held him captive for a time. And so one Sunday he took for the text of his sermon the anarchistic words of St. Paul from the first epistle to the Corinthians:

"The power of sin is the law."

It was a strange discourse that fell on the congregation from the height of that humble pulpit. Powerful, violent, lyrical, it blew like a strong wind charged with flame, over the peaceful heads of the astounded listeners. The preacher's thought, imperious and unrestrained,

seemed at first to grind to dust the obstacles heaped around us by nineteen centuries of dialectics and theology; the ancient bases of morality tottered under its blows; it appeared for an instant to hover over a desert or an abyss; it evoked the mirage of a new world, liberated from all bonds, in which the free heart and the free mind should rush forward irresistibly on a radiant path; then it returned to expire in one supreme effort of resignation, in a burning paraphrase of the words of the Lord's Prayer: "Lead us not into temptation." And there was so much despair in this peroration, which contradicted the discourse without destroying its force, that the words of the canticle, sung afterwards, assumed an ironical, almost an impious meaning:

"Our God is aye our rampart strong,
Our armor never failing;
Our sure defence against all wrong
And shield from fiends assailing.
Vain the wrath of our foes!
Though in fury they rose,
They could not harm us.
Why should they, then, alarm us,
Since our strong God hath fended off their blows?"

There was an accent of consternation in the voices, as if all felt that in front of the force they were celebrating another force had started up, the Enemy, whose defeats they loved to chant, and who is so often the conqueror:

"In vain hath Satan made
A league with Death.
Before the breath
Of our strong God he shrinks away afraid."

As soon as the church emptied, groups were formed here and there; the members of which took one another's opinions; they were not sure they had understood aright, and did not venture as yet on a definite opinion.

"And they gave out that they had now at last found us an orthodox parson," growled M. Rabourin. "Nice kind of orthodoxy that! Did ever an orthodox minister preach such a sermon?"

He was speaking to M. Tiercet, who, not wishing to compromise himself, replied by an evasive gesture, and then began:

"The fact is that —"

But was stopped by Dr. Mathorel, who was going from one person to another repeating:

"Decidedly, I must learn again the road to church!"

It was observed that M. Quartier was in an evident hurry to get out of the way, and was looking somewhat downcast. There was a renewal of the gossip of the last couple of weeks, but with more circumspection, as if the participants had a presentiment that the scandal they delighted in might have dangerous consequences; and every one looked at M. Massod de Bussens, who was marching to his carriage with stately solemnity, returning the greetings he received on the way, although no one ventured to approach him.

M. Massod de Bussens was very far from supposing that his name could be mixed up with the discussions raised by a sermon the tendency and tone of which he blamed more than any one else could possibly. Dis-

turbed, as any man of fixed principles might be who has just verified the existence in his neighborhood of a subversive force capable of undermining the ground beneath him, meditating on the way on the disastrous effects such discourses must exercise in the long run, he asked himself how they could be neutralized. The idea of appealing to the parish council occurred to him. But then, what precise charges could he bring against the sermon of Trembloz? He had not attacked any dogma. He represented the strength of temptation in too vivid colors, that was all; and certainly temptation is very strong. Though he had the appearance at one time of excusing it, did he not conclude with a prayer, in every term of which the most rigid Christian might join? And yet the harmfulness of it all, although hard to discover, was surely somewhere — in the spirit if not in the letter; is not the Enemy fruitful in wiles, able to dissemble his approaches, and sometimes as difficult to seize as a wrestler anointed with oil? The more M. Massod de Bussens analyzed his impressions the less definite they became. And yet he persisted in believing them just. When he sat down at table he summed up his reflections in these words:

"Most assuredly, M. Trembloz is a dangerous man; he is to be distrusted."

Maurice cast a terrified glance upon his mother, who, quite pale, asked:

"Why?"

"He has preached a sermon —" said M. Massod de Bussens.

For a moment he sought the proper words to characterize it, and not finding the one he wanted, concluded:

"In fine, a detestable sermon."

As it would have embarrassed him very much to give a clear explanation of the grounds on which he censured it, he was careful not to show his astonishment at the indifference with which his wife received this summary judgment.

CHAPTER XXX

"Because I Love Him!"

THE next day he received the following note by the first mail:

"A friend thinks it her duty to inform M. Massod de Bussens that M. le Pasteur Trembloz is in the habit of often meeting Mme. Massod de Bussens late in the evening at the White Rocks. Rumors of these meetings are beginning to spread through the town; it is the hope, however, of all good people that they may be put a stop to soon."

M. Massod de Bussens read this denunciation over several times. The clear, precise gist of it filled him with absolute dismay. He did not for a moment say to himself that this note, which, after all, contained no proof, might be an act of hatred or envy. Yesterday, perhaps, he would have put it aside with all the scorn which things of this kind excite in honest minds; but with a quickness of perception of which his usually slow mind might have been judged incapable, he recalled the sermon of Trembloz, and the paper which trembled in his hand appeared to him suddenly the key of the problem he had vainly sought a solution of. His

vague impressions took a definite form instantaneously; everything was explained, everything was very clear. Then he stiffened all the energies of his being to repel this frightful certainty as a thing too horrible to be true. He murmured:

"It is impossible!"

These words restored his calmness for a moment, and a crowd of arguments rose in his mind against the calumny.

And then Antoinette entered the dining-room. They hardly saluted, as was now for some time their custom. The husband gazed long on the face of the wife.

How thin and pale she had grown! Her eyes, with black circles round the rims, must have shed many tears. Why? Formerly her step was light, her demeanor that of the busy mistress of the household, all engrossed with domestic affairs; now she had a languid air, as if oppressed by some secret care, indifferent to all that surrounded her. Why? A few weeks ago she would never have allowed Maurice to start for school without embracing him and accompanying him to the gate.

"Has Maurice gone already?" he asked.

She looked at the clock, answering in an indifferent tone:

"Of course; long ago."

Were not symptoms thus strengthened almost proofs?

He folded the paper he was holding in his hand, put it carefully in his pocketbook, and rose to go out.

"Have you breakfasted?" she said.

His cup of chocolate was still untouched. He answered, however:

"Yes, I have finished."

She did not even notice the falsehood, and leaned on her elbow before her own empty cup, a far-away look in her eyes, giving no thought to her tea, which was growing cold.

As he was crossing the yard, without knowing where he was going, M. Massod de Bussens met his gardener, who wanted to consult him on the subject of the local horticultural exhibition that was soon about to open. He listened to the man, followed him into the hothouse, where certain orchids that were the objects of his particular care were blooming, among green plants and more familiar flowers. He answered mechanically. Then, as the other became persistent in getting more detailed explanations, he dismissed him. "Later on. I am busy now!"

Leaving the hothouse, he made his way, still almost unconsciously, to the White Rocks. Did they know anything, these two stones, in which two souls were said to be sleeping? Did the very quietude of these objects hide a secret? Like the juge d'instruction, who visits the theatre of a crime and looks for clews in every direction, he inspected the places around. Suddenly he shuddered. He perceived a pin on the ground, a little sapphire, finely mounted, which he recognized. She had come there, then; what further proof was needed to confirm the accusation?

M. Massod de Bussens was not jealous, in the ordinary sense of the word; jealousy implies a soul susceptible of passion, and his hardly was. Moreover, his wife had never been to him anything but a partner, whom he had taken because one cannot regulate one's own existence very well alone. But she was his wife. The idea that she should be wanting in her duties as a wife and mother disturbed him, much as the unexpected verification of a flaw in an object of some value might, which the possessor had hitherto believed perfect of its kind. Another idea, more poignant than anything else could be, was that the town should speak of her, that the curiosity of the rabble should enter his home, malignant and spiteful, and secretly delighted at the chance of rolling his respected name in the mud. And so, hurried on into a circle of maddening conjectures, he oscillated between anger and dejection, suffering after his manner as much as he was capable of suffering, a prey to troubles which his imagination could never of itself have conceived, perplexed for the first time in his life.

The legend of the White Rocks passed in a confused form across his memory. He shrugged his shoulders:

"Nonsense!" he murmured. "Life is more serious than that."

It was a phrase he was fond of repeating, every time that any romantic incident was under discussion. Carefully fastening in his vest the pin which he had just picked up, he returned slowly to his dwelling. "I must

speak to her," he was saying to himself; "I must question her. She must make a full confession, and she shall!"

He began putting his questions into shape in a loud voice and gesticulating all the while. He was so absorbed that he passed by the door and crossed the yard, where Nestor was tied up and calling to him in vain, by barking and tugging at his chain. When he came to the gate, he perceived M. Leen, who was going to town with his two children. The American, instead of passing on his way, began a conversation through the bars, inquiring with interest as to the horticultural exhibition, which, on the previous evening, had seemed to his neighbor an event of the greatest importance. M. Massod de Bussens replied with an effort. Fortunately Maud intervened.

"Father, we must take care not to be late. We may miss the boat."

"Yes," replied M. Leen; "we are going to Geneva."

The party started off with rapid step. M. Massod de Bussens followed them with an anxious eye.

"There was an odd look about M. Leen," he said to himself; "he knows something; he has heard surely."

Every one, then, was better informed, or thought he was, than himself.

"But I shall know too — yes, yes, I must know!"

As he continued standing on the same spot, he observed Dr. Mathorel's cabriolet at the turn of the road. To avoid any further talk, he went away.

"This time, I am going to speak to her. What is the good of waiting? What is the good?"

He turned in the direction of the garden.

At the moment, Antoinette was coming down the steps; she looked, in her gray dress, so simple, so correct, so innocent! Is it possible, then, that no outward sign ever reveals those monstrous things, treason and adultery? Can a woman trail her soul in falsehood, her body in vice, and preserve the purity of her face, the peacefulness of every lineament, the confidence of every look? It is impossible! A word of explanation would put an end to this frightful misunderstanding. He called her.

"Antoinette!"

She stopped as she was descending, a little annoyed.

"Do you wish anything?"

He approached her.

"I want to speak to you."

None of the phrases he had prepared suited for opening the conversation.

"Speak!" she said.

He took off his hat to wipe his forehead. Then, finding no better way, he resolved to come to the point at once; he drew out his pocketbook, took the anonymous note, unfolded it and placed it under the eyes of Antoinette:

"Read that!"

She became frightfully pale.

"Well? Have you nothing to say? It is—"

"It is true!"

Seized with a fit of dizziness, he gazed at her as if he did not comprehend. She repeated very low:

"Yes, it is true; I have walked occasionally to the White Rocks. I met M. Trembloz twice."

"And — that is all?"

She drew herself up, very proudly.

"That is all."

He breathed, already reassured.

"Then your meeting was accidental?"

She looked at him.

"The first time, yes."

He was disturbed anew.

"The first time only? But the second?"

"The second? Ah, I do not know!"

His sleeping anger rose again.

"What! You do not know? What does that mean? You do not know! You had arranged a rendezvous, then?"

"No."

He became quite enraged.

"I do not understand you. Explain yourself. Now is the time to speak frankly. I insist on knowing all; yes, all!"

With a firm countenance and calm voice, Antoinette said gently, after a few moments of silence:

"I do not wish to hide anything from you, my friend. After these two meetings we have both thought that it would be better not to see each other again. That is the reason why he no longer comes to the Tilleuls.

That is why I no longer go out under pretence of my health. My health! I was never in better. But we must see each other no more!"

As if he did not understand the meaning of these words — and perhaps he did not understand it — M. Massod de Bussens asked:

"See him no more! Why?"

In a voice that was almost a whisper, but firm, she replied:

"Because I love him!"

He was falling from one surprise into another.

"You love him!" he shouted; "you love him!"

And giving free rein to his indignation:

"You, an honest woman! You, a mother, and you are still thinking of your romances and your follies! Yet you are happy, you have all that you wish. What is wanting to you? What do you complain of?"

She murmured, with eyes that seemed to be looking into the past:

"I do not complain. I have never complained!"

"Faith!" he answered roughly, "I should have liked to see you! You have forgotten your duties, that is all, simply! Without reason or motive, like all who fall. Love! Does a good woman love any one except her husband! Have I ever loved any woman except you, have I? Or even looked on one? Love! What room is there for it in an active and upright life? You work; you do your duty, that is sufficient."

She had sunk down on a rustic chair that happened

to be near her, with closed lips, resolved to be silent and to hear everything with resignation. Her husband, with hands crossed behind his back or gesticulating, was striding backward and forward, pausing, placing intervals between his phrases, waiting for the answers that did not come, and gradually becoming exasperated by this silence.

"You do not reply! Come, why do you not speak? Why do you not defend yourself?"

She remained dumb.

"You will say nothing, then? Ah! I know what you are of old! You don't deceive me! You admire your conduct, and think you have acted rightly. Rightly! God knows the sophistries of the heart! But you may deceive yourself as much as you wish, your conscience will have the last word! You may be sure it will punish you in the end. And, then, have you said to yourself that all is known? You have been met or seen, and God knows what is suspected! In a word, you are the talk of the town, the jest of the rabble! Good God! I seem to hear all the people in their clubs or in front of their shops — these people who detest us at bottom, because we are so much above them! I can fancy the joy with which they are discussing us! Dragging you in the gutter and having their filthy gibes at my expense! Oh! heaven and earth! what have we come to?"

He stopped after this exclamation, went to the end of an alley, the gravel crackling under his heavy steps, returned and changed his tone:

"All that I say to you is useless. Words cast on the air! Something must be done — something, do you hear? What? You do not even ask what!"

The dumb lips half opened and pronounced slowly:

"I shall do whatever you wish, my friend."

He continued in a milder and more rational tone:

"You must understand that these sort of things, when nothing has occurred that is — irreparable! — are soon forgotten. You fancy that nobody has ever had a romance but you. It shows how much you know of the world! Your story is common, like all ugly stories. But that is not the question. The main point now is to put an end to this — this ridiculous affair, which they will talk of. Good God, how they will talk of it! Well, a stop must be put to this. I see only one way. You must leave this place — yes, leave it. You have been pretending to be in ill health for the past fortnight; that will be a good pretext. Whether those people believe it or don't believe it is their concern! You can go to take the waters at Vals, Royat or wherever you wish. You will remain two or three months. At the end of that time everything will be forgotten."

She acquiesced by a sign of the head.

"I will go," she said.

He became angry anew.

"Oh, indeed! It would not astonish me if you made objections. That would be all that was wanting! You shall go. And at once, too! Not in a month, nor in a fortnight. You have just time to pack your trunks."

Something within her rose in protest; not to see him again, not to take a last farewell of him, to have him learn of her departure only by public rumor; it seemed a kind of treason, a cruelty, an injustice, a forgetfulness of the tenderness and pity that connected them. He would have the right to hate or despise her, to believe her indifferent or cold or frivolous. Or, perhaps, he would divine, and simply suffer, without knowing or hoping, alone and calumniated under the malice of the looks which she avoided by flight. These thoughts passed through her like keen swords, piercing and torturing. But she understood she could do nothing against all these sorrows; and without a struggle, but with an instinctive thought of her own safety, she said in a tone of entreaty:

"I may bring Maurice?"

"Ah, I should like to see you!" cried M. Massod de Bussens. "No! He shall remain with me. You have forgotten that you were a mother. I will not trust my son with you."

Was it not a further treason to deliver the child to so harsh a father? But Antoinette did not insist; it was as if her heart was growing emptier every minute. The lights which till now had illumined her soul were quenched, one after the other; she no longer experienced anything except a vague sensation of nothingness and darkness, like those unfortunates whom the cold freezes during the night.

CHAPTER XXXI

The Tongue of Slander at Work

As was the case every year, the horticultural exhibition was installed in the Place d'Armes; a wooden palisade surrounded the reserved enclosure, which was entered by a turnstile. Then the visitor was among beds adorned with all the flowers of the season, while green plants formed here and there exotic groups, and, in the centre, specimens of the Alpine flora were climbing up the flanks of an artificial rock, equally remarkable for their dazzling variety of colors and the wild perfume they exhaled. Usually this rock was an object of great admiration, but, as it was no longer a novelty, the distinguishing feature of the exhibition was the orchids of M. Massod de Bussens. Bielle had heretofore been ignorant of these capricious flowers, and M. Pidoux, who passed for a man of great enlightenment and a botanist, had a busy time explaining their fantastic oddities and their singular alimentation. Numerous groups were constantly pressing forward to the jardinière where they were displayed, and, by a very natural digression, the conversation glided from the plants to their owners.

M. Massod de Bussens took a very lively interest in this exhibition, which he had helped to found, in conjunction with the "Society for the Embellishment of Bielle," and its success had always been one of the things nearest to his heart. Every year, at the opening, he was seen in the midst of his plants, complacently expounding his methods of culture, perfectly contented with the results and with the compliments that were lavished on him. His wife used always to accompany him. It was said that she took an active share in the horticultural labors of her husband, although her partiality was rather for the simpler flowers than for those that were raised with so much difficulty; she was fond of their unpretentious beauty and familiar perfume, and the little shopkeepers of Bielle were pleased with her for this preference, which revealed her modesty. Now, this year the exposition opened, according to the customary rites, with some discourses, but without the Massods de Bussens. And from nine in the morning their absence was discussed in presence of their orchids. It was M. Quartier who first referred to it. He had just delivered himself of a remarkably finely turned speech: "The flowers, smile of nature, — Spring, the youth of the year," etc. Still quite excited, his fat face turning from red to violet, he shouted, formulating thoughtlessly the remark which each was making in petto:

"M. Massod de Bussens not here! What does that mean?"

Mme. Quartier, who was accustomed to keep an unceasing watch on her husband's reckless tongue, pressed his arm, but too late, for one of the persons present, Dr. Mathorel, hastened to explain:

"No. His wife is leaving for the waters to-day. He is going with her to the railway station; he told me yesterday he could not come until the afternoon."

A woman's voice was next heard: "Poor Mme. Massod de Bussens has been very ill for some days."

Another inquired with a tone of interest:

"Is it serious?"

Mathorel assumed a mysterious air, the air of a man who knows everything, but will tell nothing.

"She needs a good deal of care. But repose and pure air will — you understand!"

Then there was an interchange of looks, questioning smiles and malicious glances; the persons under criticism were so distinguished, of such high station, that no one dared to indulge in those hazardous conjectures which are always provoked in small places by any unusual incident, or to repeat in public the inferences that made up the principal charm of the delightful gossip between neighbor and neighbor. But eyes spoke to eyes, one face examined and sounded another, each one trying to find out if others had more information or less discretion. So that, after a few moments, the conversation grew animated, became bolder and more positive; those who did not know endeavoring to learn

from those who did, and those who knew anything burning to get rid of it.

"Was it not you who advised her to leave, doctor?" asked some one.

"Yes, it was I."

"And — where did you send her?"

"To Vals, in the Cevennes."

"What kind of waters are there?"

"Alkaline and bicarbonate."

A sharp voice hissed:

"It would seem as if bicarbonate was the remedy that was needed!"

Some laughter that was quickly hushed, and then another question was put.

"Does she take her little boy with her?"

"No; she starts alone."

"Why does she not take him?"

Here M. Marquillier interrupted.

"And the college? It is not vacation time. M. Massod de Bussens has too great an interest in our schools to give a bad example by interfering with the studies of his son!"

"You think so, really?"

"Most assuredly."

There were hums and shakings of the head; no one admitted the explanation. But at this moment the presence of M. Morand was noticed. He had escaped from his office for a few minutes, and was making the tour of the flower beds very rapidly, with eyes wide open, like a

busy man who wants to see everything without wasting time. In order to reach the orchids he elbowed his way through three or four persons, thus breaking the conversation. He contemplated the strange flowers, and said in a loud voice:

"Funny plants, those!"

He was seen to smile as if at some loose idea or other; then, when he was at a little distance, a voice remarked:

"By the way, the young girl Mme. Massod took into her home? What has become of her?"

Immediately some one answered:

"She is no longer at the Tilleuls."

"Ah! Where is she, then?"

"With the Americans at Bois-Joli."

"You don't say so! Hum!"

Mme. Quartier gave a few details with an air of indifference:

"Yes, she was a sort of apple of discord in the household. The girl is naturally bad — I said as much before. Yes, Mme. Massod de Bussens insisted on keeping her. But her husband would not have it. So you understand?"

A woman ventured to interrupt:

"It would seem they are not always on as good terms as they might be."

"Oh!" corrected Mme. Quartier, "until now they agreed very well. But —"

She stopped perfidiously.

"There is something, then?" she was asked.

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Oh! silly stories!"

M. Quartier, with conciliatory intent, intervened:

"If one were to believe all people say!"

"You're quite right, one would not care to live any longer!"

"Still, there's no smoke without fire!"

About ten, the Sordes family made its entrance into the enclosure. It was a diversion; the group stationed before the orchids melted away on their approach. They returned greetings and exchanged a few handshakes. It could be seen that M. Sordes, after contemplating the strange flowers, made a gesture of blame, as if he recognized in them certain symbols of universal corruption. His long serious face assumed a gloomy aspect; in a loud voice he addressed these words to his wife, words which were intended for all:

"This is not natural!"

Five or six ladies had taken refuge in a quiet corner, near a deserted basket of hortensias, in order to continue their conversation. One of them, pointing with an imperceptible gesture to M. Sordes, whispered:

"And his colleague? Is he not going to come?"

Another answered in the same tone:

"M. Trembloz? He seldom shows himself anywhere these days!"

"Ah!"

"He has his reasons for it."

"You are sure? What reasons can he have?"

Then there were phrases clipped or cut off in the middle, exclamations with a world of hidden meaning.

"You may be quite certain he thinks of other things beside his sermons!"

"A shocking affair altogether!"

"And for a pastor! Oh!"

"Who would ever have believed it?"

"But we know nothing!"

"We know what we know, that's enough!"

"What could you expect? When a man holds such theories as he does! But as far as I am concerned, I have always distrusted people who are too much inclined to indulgence! Yes, they begin by being indulgent to others, and end by being so to themselves!"

"And now he has brought his pigs to a nice market!"

"Bah! it will all turn out all right!"

"You think so? But, my dear madame, tell me how?"

"Gracious! how do I know! By a marriage, perhaps."

"A marriage! Why, who would care to have him, especially at present?"

"Who?"

The stout lady, on whose words the others were hanging breathless, slowly turned her eyes around and fixed them at last upon Jeanne Sordes, standing motionless beside her mother, and with an absent look. Then there was a chorus of such exclamations as "You don't

believe it!" "It isn't possible!" "After all, why not?" It made a protracted and confused buzzing.

The Sordes, having finished their visit, went away; hardly had they left when the great news, so suddenly thrown on the air near the hortensias, started from the little group that originated it and penetrated every corner of the exhibition; at first hesitating, doubtful, modified by reservations, it gradually took consistency from the comments it raised. In the neighborhood of eleven o'clock Mme. Tiercet, who arrived in a hat adorned with a wreath of red roses, roses of a livelier red than any in the exhibition, brought certain details, without explaining where she got them. This very elegant person, whose bright colors contrasted with the grave tone of the other toilets, gave the following narrative with great animation:

"I have just met M. Massod de Bussens near the station. There were two immense trunks and a valise on the carriage. Does not that prove that her absence is going to be a long one? There has been terrible trouble at the Tilleuls! Oh! you have no idea of it! And an explanation! M. Massod de Bussens is not a man to be trifled with, I assure you! He determined at once to put a stop to gossip, and he was right! And the parsonage! Old Mother Trembloz, you know what a domineering woman she is! A peasant with no education to speak of, but as sharp as a razor; she knows what she wants, you may rely on it! 'After this scandal,' she said to her son, 'you have only one

thing to do: get married as quick as you can!' He did not relish the advice at all; but she proved to him that a marriage was his last plank of safety. She said to him — all that could be said — he gave way at last — by all accounts! Without enthusiasm, as you may well believe! But he saw in the end that his mother was right."

They heard her, astonished at learning so much at one stroke, but still doubtful.

"You are sure of all you say, my dear madame; quite sure!"

"Perfectly!"

"Is your information official?"

"No — not yet."

"Then let us wait!"

At the hour for dinner the place began to empty, so that it was almost deserted when M. Massod de Bussens appeared. For a man of his character, at once haughty and timorous, entirely swayed by the sense of his own overpowering respectability, and altogether dismayed at the notion that public curiosity should meddle with his family affairs, it required a great effort to meet thus in full daylight the gaze of the Biellians; he accomplished it, however, having judged that it was his duty, and rejected as a species of cowardice the temptation to return to the Tilleuls. He decided to impose silence on his fellow burgesses by his presence and turn aside their suspicions by his calmness. A little pale, but without anything in his heavy, regular features betray-

ing his strong emotion, he held Maurice by the hand. The little fellow's eyes were still swollen and his young breast was still panting with sobs after the late parting; for at the station, when the train rushed in like some furious monster that stopped for a moment and carried off his mother, and when she, rigid, cold and tearless, kissed him with her pallid lips, the child had a fit of terrible despair. And the father, for the first time, had been moved. Forgetful of his "principles," instead of scolding, he did his best to console him, finding in his own troubled heart words the meaning of which he was beginning to learn, words soft and tender; and now, while his own annoyances were becoming more painful, he felt glad to see the little fellow interested in the things about him, already beginning to forget his grief. In fact, though at first timid and shy, with his hand trembling in a hand he had dreaded so long, Maurice was regaining his cheerfulness, as he felt its gentle and caressing touch. Soon after, when he had grown tired of the green plants and dazzling flowers in his neighborhood, he ventured, for the first time in his life, to ask his father a question.

"Papa, where are your flowers?"

M. Massod de Bussens led him in front of the orchids, which he himself regarded sadly, asking how it was that he should ever have been so engrossed by them, while Maurice, standing close to him, was saying:

"They are not so pretty as they were at home."

It was true: arrayed on the jardinière, they had that

worn and piteous aspect which things extremely delicate assume when too many eyes have looked on them. Maurice pulled at the hand of his father, who allowed himself to be drawn away. In another corner, before a bank of lilies that had also come from the Tilleuls, the child, suddenly recalling his loss, exclaimed, pressing against his father, as if he was speaking of the dead:

"Mamma used to be so fond of them!"

Gradually, however, the visitors flocked in again; some insatiable, returning for the second time; others fresh, curious and admiring. The presence of M. Massod de Bussens was very much commented on. There was an interchange of some such remarks as:

"So he decided to come. Oh! ho!"

Many saluted him; he replied with the somewhat haughty reserve habitual to him, which cut short any attempt at familiarity. He shook hands with none except M. Quartier, who detained him a moment before the orchids; then he remained alone, until M. Leen, accompanied by his two children, came up to address him. Maud and Francis, always full of spirits and merriment, soon had Maurice running along the alleys with them, while the two fathers sat down upon a bench to converse. M. Leen, in an ordinary and natural tone that banished all ideas of suspicion or curiosity, made inquiries as to the departure of Mme. Massod de Bussens, her plans and her health.

"I hope you have no serious reason for anxiety?"

"No, no. A little fatigue, a little weakness. Dr.

Mathorel tells me I have not the slightest occasion for alarm."

M. Massod de Bussens was not an adept at falsehood; he blushed and hung his head.

"Will the cure take long?" the American returned.

"I do not know. That depends. Possibly some weeks."

"I hope you will often come to Bois-Joli, now that you are alone. Your little Maurice will be longing after his mother; bring him with you to play with the children."

"Thank you; you are very kind."

The people crossing in front of them examined them with a quick glance, at the same time whispering. Annoyed by this curiosity, which stung him as an insult, M. Massod de Bussens rose, saying to his companion:

"Would you mind taking a turn?"

They went round the exhibition two or three times together, while behind them the criticisms of the townsfolk followed their usual course.

"He hardly more than condescended to notice the greeting of the syndic."

"He must be in a terrible bad temper!"

"And so pale!"

"And his eyes red, as if he had been weeping!"

"And the little boy?"

"Oh! he is a child; he knows nothing; see him playing; he has forgotten all about his mother."

"That is really not proper; his father ought to have kept him at home!"

At this point a person who had been present at the station broke in; she was brimful of fresh information:

"The poor child cried and sobbed and writhed in a way that was enough to break any one's heart who saw it. She said nothing, did not seem to perceive anything. She kissed her child once only, when she was entering the train, and shook hands coldly with her husband, as one might do with a stranger. Then the train whistled — M. Massod de Bussens remained standing in the same place at least five minutes, quite pale and downcast. The child no longer dared to cry. At last they left together. It was as sad as a funeral!"

When M. Massod de Bussens had come to the conclusion that he had exhibited himself sufficiently, he called to Maurice and took leave of M. Leen. As he was about passing out through the turnstile, he met Trembloz, who was just entering, he, too, having understood that he must not fail to be present at the local solemnity. It was a moment of tragic emotion, worthy of being compared to those anxious minutes through which the spectators at a circus pass when at an abrupt pause of the orchestra an acrobat takes his most perilous turn.

Up to then, the Biellians had veiled their curiosity; now, they gave it free rein; their conversations ceased in a moment, all eyes were riveted on the two men. Those in a better position to see remarked or thought

they remarked a movement on the part of Maurice to run up to the pastor, which M. Massod de Bussens at once checked by a heavy pressure of the hand that nearly forced a cry from the child. Still, the two men saluted each other, the one ceremoniously and gravely, the other haughtily and stiffly. Trembloz was then lost among the crowd.

CHAPTER XXXII

God will send me Peace

He looked at the people and the things around him, he saw nothing but the maddening vision of the train, which he had beheld some hours ago from the edge of the highway outside the town, rushing on in noise and smoke, crushing his heart as if it lay palpitating on the rails, and, on its disappearance, leaving in his lacerated soul nothing but the desperate sensation of a something gone that would never come back. Through the noise of the footsteps, the babble of the voices, he heard only the cry of his thoughts, more troubled than the black waters of the lake when the tempest has shaken their depths, so confused that he did not comprehend them, in such agony that he had now and then to repress a cry of pain. He wandered about among the plants, almost dazed, scarcely conscious of the curious looks that rested on him. With a mechanical gesture he returned the salutations he received. Little by little the noise, the movement and the colors, and also the vague prayers he was murmuring quite low, without stirring the lips, began to dull his pain and restore his composure. Fortunately he had remained more than a quarter of

an hour alone, nobody caring to approach him. At last, moved by a kindly impulse, M. Quartier came and offered his hand.

"Good day, M. le Pasteur; how are you?"

"Very well, M. le Syndic, thank you."

"Ah! so much the better! so much the better! What do you think of our exhibition?"

"Oh, very fine indeed!"

"Is it not? It is the finest we have ever had!"

When the syndic left him, Trembloz perceived the thin figure of Mlle. Surgeat, very humble in her poor black gown, which seemed always the same, surrounded by five or six ladies who were disputing for the favor of her smiles. She gave him a compassionate look which seemed to call him; so that, after a brief hesitation, in obedience to one of those suggestions the hopeless sometimes have of going where pity is offered, he ventured to approach and salute her. She offered him her hand, encased in its cotton glove, that old hand that knew so well how to bestow an alms, and, hardly moving her lips, in order to be heard by him alone, she said:

"Have courage!"

At the same time she added for the benefit of others:

"I should be delighted, M. le Pasteur, if you would visit me occasionally. Come and see me, I entreat you. We should surely find some subjects on which we could talk with pleasure."

The attitude of the old maid, who was at once so rich, so benevolent and respected, created a reaction in

public opinion immediately. Hats were now raised to Trembloz, without the faces of their wearers betraying any of the irony that accompanied the gesture before. The remarks that were still made about him became of a more guarded character: since M. de Bussens had returned his salute, although with an ungracious hauteur; since he evidently preserved M. Quartier's favor; since Mlle. Surgeat showed him sympathy and invited him to her house; since he himself bravely affirmed by his presence in a public place that he was not the hero of a scandal, what did the whole affair amount to? A little smoke scarcely, a mere nothing; there would be still some whispers for a few days longer; then Mme. Massod de Bussens would return, forgetful or resigned — no one could tell — and the peace of the little town, disturbed for a moment by a threatening storm, would resume its regular course, broken into only by the Sunday sermons, which, no doubt, would no longer turn on alarming texts, and might be admired without reserve. "All he has to do now is to marry Jeanne Sordes!" said some one who remained rancorous.

But a prudent individual replied:

"Pshaw! that story is tattle like the rest!"

And another repeated with emphasis:

"Like the rest!"

Trembloz left at the same time as M. Leen and his two children. He would have preferred to pass on alone, but he could not escape his pupils, who were

very fond of him, and began to talk of their Latin with their customary frankness. They were still at the fables of Phædrus; Francis was in ecstasies at discovering that he had met his old friend, Lafontaine, in a new garb, while Maud had some safe observations to make on animals in general. M. Leen soon joined in the conversation, and, when they reached the end of the main street, proposed to Trembloz to accompany them a part of the way to Bois-Joli. Trembloz did not venture to refuse, the less so as he dreaded having to encounter on his return a new assault by his mother, who had now for some days, as Mme. Tiercet related, been constantly besieging him on the subject of his marriage. As they were descending slowly the little decline that runs along the Esplanade, the children outstripped them. Trembloz then believed he noticed that M. Leen, without appearing to have the air of it, was examining him with just a little too much attention. He had a dull feeling of revolt at the thought; was the whole world then to read his secret? And so he began to talk with nervous fluency of a thousand things that were far away from his mind. But when they were passing by the gate of the Tilleuls, behind which he perceived the huge form of Nestor, feeling that emotion was making his voice tremble, he was silent, and turned away his head. Some steps further on, the little path leading to the White Rocks opened. As his eyes wandered sadly for a moment in the direction of the spot, his companion, who possibly knew nothing of his story, asked in a very natural tone:

"Do you know the legend, monsieur, the legend of the two rocks at the end of that path?"

Trembloz collected all his strength to answer.

"No, monsieur."

"It is curious," continued the American. "It has a deeper and more modern significance than is usual with these kind of stories. Shall I relate it to you?"

"If you please."

"It deals with two beings who loved each other, and yet were kept apart by some cause or other that is not explained. They wished to find a refuge in God; whether that they felt too weak to respect their duties without other support than the fragile support of the world, or that their heart sought in divine love a consolation, or, perhaps, something their own love might feed on. The man entered a Trappist monastery, the ruins of which, at the foot of the Jura, you are doubtless acquainted with. The woman took the veil in a convent which formerly existed yonder on the other side of the town."

He turned round towards Bielle, which appeared in all its coquettish grace, prettily toned down under the cloudy sky.

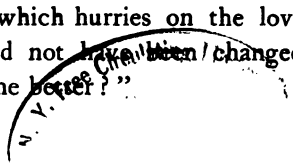
"How they saw each other again, the story does not say. But it is related that they met almost every night in a clearing of the Bois-Joli, which at that time was a thick forest of pines. They were both faithful and loyal of soul, and determined to respect their vows. However, every time they met they felt their love

was increasing. Though they repressed it with all their energy, this guilty love, this criminal love was driving them into each other's arms with all the tragic force that is in noble hearts. They then understood that their will was exhausted in the struggle and defeat was approaching. And, on the evening when, for the first time, their lips were united, they agreed they would never meet again, to avoid the crime from which they were yet pure. They bade each other a farewell which they believed would be eternal. But, when they tried to separate, a wonder occurred; their limbs stiffened; the propitious soil on which their love had sprung into being held them; the mysterious power of the earth kept them side by side forever. In the effort against love, humanity had died in them. Their souls had conquered, but had perished in the agony of the struggle. They were now two stones, forever insensible — the White Rocks. Is it not a beautiful legend?"

Trembloz, who was quite pale, murmured:

"Very beautiful."

"And full of meaning, too," returned M. Leen; "do you not think so? Just only consider! if they had yielded to their guilty love, what would have happened? They would have been damned, I suppose; subjected to some of those frightful punishments the imagination of the men of their time invented; plunged, for example, in the eternal whirlpool which hurries on the lovers of Rimini. But they would not have been changed into stones. And which is the better?"



When they reached his villa he asked:

"Will you not come in for a few moments?"

Trembloz felt that all the cruel, torturing emotions he believed he had vanquished had awakened in him again. He refused, and returned on his way to the town.

"They would not have been changed into stones!"

These words pursued him like a fatal decree. With his bruised heart and the void in his head, his limbs felt so heavy that he could almost believe a miracle was taking place in him. He revolted; the legend lied, or else M. Leen, like the skeptic and cynic he was, had given it a sense it did not naturally bear, had found a monstrous meaning in it. He summoned all his principles to his aid, he invoked his moral beliefs, his love of righteousness and goodness and his God. And, halting on the deserted road, he affirmed in a loud voice:

"We have done our duty. We have done well!"

But where, then, was the inward joy which certain oracles promise to sacrifice accomplished?

He would have vainly tried to find it in his tortured heart; the struggle had been too vehement; the triumph resembled one of those victories that have no to-morrow, which cripple the conqueror and leave him weaker than the enemy. While he was thus turning his sorrow in every light in a vain search for some hoped-for gleam of comfort, there started up from the depths of his being, as if to mock him, the mirages of the crime avoided, radiant mirages that were at once extin-

guished by the sentiment of the fate he had chosen, and engulfed in desert wastes, like those in which the caravans perish.

He murmured:

"Later on — God will send me peace."

But it was his lips only that uttered the words; in his heart more strongly resounded the fatal decree:

"They would not have been changed into stones!"

And in an obscure way, without attempting to reduce to form the vague and blurred ideas that were passing through his brain, he had some dim notion of the lot of those men who have too much soul to ignore love and too much virtue to yield to it carelessly and joyously; sorrow awaits them whether they resist or fall; the light shining within them must either consume them or be quenched itself, and if they are not the guilty victims of their hearts, it is because there is nothing more left for their hearts except to turn into stone.

THE END